







THE DEAD BOY.

OUR PARISH;

OR,

Mr. Sarah A. Rollins
ANNALS OF PASTOR AND PEOPLE.
Great-Hall
N. H.

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P R E F A C E .

I OFFER you, dear reader, only humble chronicles. They are of the quiet and still life of a country parish. I have set them down without any attempt at fine writing, trusting to nothing more than their truthfulness and simplicity to interest you.

You will find in these pages the observations of one whose walk has been for a long time in rustic quietudes — among those earnest and sincere souls that gather, every Sabbath, in simple country churches. You will find, too, as you read on, that human hearts are essentially the same under all conditions — the same motives, whether of ambition, love, selfishness, or hatred, swaying them within the precincts of a village circle as within the walls of a wealthy and populous town.

Whatever may be the moral of the whole, the sympathizing reader will find it stamped plainly enough on every page. If, however, any one feeling is intentionally inculcated above any other, it is that of love one for another. Without this there is no charity; and without charity we are destitute of all the virtues that are really worth possessing.

That the book may succeed in awakening the interest of even a few, and, still further, in warming ever so little the better natures of all, is the single and sincere wish of

THE AUTHOR.

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OUR PARISH.

CHAPTER I.

THE STAGE COACH.

ON a dull and dreary day in November, while the winds were shouting in their shrill voices from the boughs of the trees which they had rifled of their leaves, and running mad races along the roadsides and across the bleak pastures and uplands, the stage coach was toiling slowly over the New England hills that heralded a little village that slept within their bosom.

It was already mid-afternoon. The sun had been obscured quite all the day, and the atmosphere was heavy with the breaths of a brewing storm. Every indication had been given of the setting in of an early winter. The stubble lands along the winding old country roads looked bare and desolate; and the trees that had, only a few weeks before, flung down dark and rich shadows over the stone walls, for the comfort of the traveller, were now denuded and shivering.

The stage coach continued the monotonous creaking of its leathern springs, and the same tiresome rattle of its heavy wheels, while ever and anon the patient driver spoke his cheerful chirrup to his horses, beguiling himself of his tediousness by the snatch of a whistle or a song.

Within the coach there were four passengers. One of them — with whom this history will have especially to do — was to appearance quite a young man, perhaps twenty-four or five years of age, with a finely-expressive countenance, and a general bearing that had not failed to challenge the admiration of his fellow-travellers since the moment he became of their number. The other three were of the same sex, and appeared to be journeying on beyond the village where the coach was about to halt temporarily. One of them was an object of special notice and pity, inasmuch as he was a man with a silvery head, and appeared to be very much intoxicated. It was evident, too, from the manners he still labored to exhibit, that his breeding had been much above the standard he had at this time reached; some untoward accident of fortune, or some strong and steady temptation, having succeeded in fastening the chain and ball to his character, which he dragged about after him in a weak and wearisome way that was even more than pitiful. The others answered his pointless inquiries, or slightly acknowledging his empty observations, sometimes smiling at his strange drollery in spite of themselves, yet always pitying the sight of a reduced and disabled intellect.

The old man had attempted conversation several times with the younger one whom I have alluded to, now employing humor and badinage to draw him out from his reserve, and now putting him inquiries of a direct nature, that few men of ordinary civility would have refused to answer.

It appeared that, during the ride, the elder man had ascertained from the other that he was a clergyman; more than this, that he was at that time on his way to fulfil an engagement he had recently entered into with a country parish; and, still more than that, that the very next village to which the stage coach would bring them was the one where his services for an entire year had been secured. Forthwith, therefore, the latter rose in the other's esteem. Despite the old man's insensibility to what was due himself, he seemed to have an instinctive knowledge of what was, in this case at least, due to another, and began to show a sense of respect one would hardly have looked for in a man in just his unfortunate condition.

"*My* father was a minister," finally broke out the old man, after he had indulged in a long and drowsy pause.

"Ah!" exclaimed the other; "where was he settled?"

"Well — well, sir — just *now* I can't tell you;" all this was spoken very slowly, and with the greatest effort at deliberation; "but 'twas a good ways off from *here*, I can tell you. May be you never was in that part of the country."

"Very likely. But how long has he been dead?" he continued, growing interested in the confession.

"It's — it's full twenty years, sir," answered the old man. "You was nothing more than a baby when he died. I was a trifle younger than I am, too. I wasn't exactly what you see me now, neither."

A misty memory seemed to swim over the surface of his heart, and he felt that tears were sailing about in his eyes. But the memory had much of light braided in with its darker colors, for it gave him quite as much joy as sadness to live it over again. He went on, partly in a half soliloquy, and some of the time looking the young clergyman in the face.

"Yes, my poor father's dead — *dead!* I sometimes think I helped shorten his days for him, for he wanted me to follow the same calling he had chosen. *Me!* — just look at it — and here I am! No, no, sir; it was a lucky thing that I never was guilty of disgracing not only myself, but *that* profession besides. I should have had every thing to answer for — more than I feel I've got now."

"You have been in some business, I conclude?" asked the clergyman, pitying him more than ever.

"Business? O, yes, sir; *that's* what I have. I may say — I may say I've done business enough to — well, to make two men just as rich as four ought to be. By riches I don't mean any thing but enough to put a man's family beyond the want of what's needful, and comfortable, and so on. But some people have a way of *keeping* their money that others haven't got; and I wasn't one of that kind ever that could hold on, and hold on, when there's so many ways for a man to do good with his money."

He paused to recall the past a little.

“You may think I was reckless; perhaps you do, seeing me to-day. But that wasn’t what swamped me. I got in with a dishonest partner, and I very soon saw the end of my hopes. My nature, you see, never was very suspicious; so I let him have pretty much his own way, gave up to him in every thing, made a great confidant of him, told him all my plans, how much I was worth, and every thing else any scheming villain could have wanted to know; and at last he got hold of the handle of the whip, as they say, and fairly scourged me out of my own doors. And here I am!”

The confession interested the others no less than the young clergyman. They could not naturally help feeling a deep sympathy for one in his situation, while the dark fear chased suddenly over their hearts that possibly, in the undisclosed course of events, they might be sucked into just such another whirlpool, and in their turn involuntarily challenge the same feelings of sympathy they now so freely bestowed.

“Have you no family?” asked the clergyman.

“Heaven help them, if I have!” returned the old man, with evident agitation. “Poor Mary’s gone home to her rest! *She’s* beyond the reach of want or woe. I had two children; but——”

He could not go on, but plunged his eyes out upon the ground, and fell into a revery of sadness.

“Poor man!” was the mental ejaculation of every one in the coach.

The two other men exchanged glances, and slowly shook their heads. The clergyman threw his eyes out of the coach window, and began to observe the appearance of the country through which he was riding.

It was many years ago, this afternoon scene in November, in the good old sociable days of stage coaches, and of cheery country inns, crowded full with comforts for travellers, and of pleasant and chatty drivers. The screech of the steam whistle had not yet sent its wild echoes into the hollows of the hills to frighten the rural deities from their abodes by the brooks and in the woods; neither was the roar and the rattle of the dark, snake-like train to be heard along on the mountain sides, and in the deep gorges, and across the smiling meadows. People journeyed by days' marches, as it were, without the haste and recklessness that characterize the present times, and — I am very much given to thinking — with a more wholesome and healthy sense of the *pleasure* of travelling. Yet these contrasts between this and the old time may not be profitable, after all.

But the former customs were so much in vogue, at the time this history begins, that there was fixed an ancient stage horn at the side of the driver's box, which he presently took from its socket, and commenced blowing with all his might, to apprise those at the next inn that he was coming up as fast as he could. And, to make good his notes of announcement, he swung his long lash twice or thrice over the heads of his jaded horses, and finally

brought out from the end of it, with a notable jerk, one of the clearest, smacking cracks that ever sent its echoes down among the hollows of any hills. The horses made a fresh start, and ran rapidly through the little ravine, and up the next hill before them.

"We are near our next stopping-place," remarked one of the travellers.

The young clergyman felt the force of the remark in full. It would be a stopping-place indeed for him — of a far different character than to those who would wait only for a cold bite of meat or pie and the operation of changing horses. Here he was to begin his work in the world. Here he was to establish himself, by labor and piety, by love and good works, until he should feel that he had reaped all the harvest that was ripe for his sickle.

It was a thoughtful mood into which he at once relapsed, as the coach bore him swiftly forward; during which he ran over in his mind all the prospects and probabilities, all the hopes and fears, the trials and the delights, of his oncoming career, and tried to imagine the natures with which his heart would daily be called into contact, and to read in advance the pages of the history that was not yet opened, and silently prayed that he might never falter nor fail, but stoutly carry forward the banner he had received, till called on to surrender all his trust at the beck of the pale messenger who will summon us all in turn away.

His thoughts were not sad nor heavy, yet they imposed a feeling of responsibility upon his heart that made his lips

dumb. He felt the aid of courage, for it was given him of Heaven; yet the courage was strangely mixed with a sense of fear and shrinking, that kept his heart in a state not unlike that of disquietude. Should he do all that Heaven required of one who had enlisted for life in the service? Would the moments never steal into the daily life when the high purposes, the Christian resolutions, the yearning desires would be blighted temporarily with irresolution, or faintheartedness, or perhaps despair? Would his feelings never sicken, and his strength never give out, when he saw himself standing alone in the vineyard, and all his fellow-laborers lounging idly about in the very heat of the day?

Even the most trustful and devoted man might well ask himself these questions; for humanity is but weak in its greatest strength, and often staggers and falters when the path is open to aid.

From this train of thought he was roused at last by the drawing up of the coach before the inn door. The driver jumped down from his box, and acquainted the inside with the fact that they could get refreshments here while the horses were changing.

The young clergyman — who should by this time be known as Mr. Humphreys — alighted, saw to the getting off of his baggage, paid his fare, and went into the house. The landlord welcomed him, no less than the others, within his doors, asking them if they would like any thing to eat. Pushing into an inner room, spacious and cheerful, with

one of the pleasantest fires imaginable burning on the hearth, they gathered around the blaze, and inwardly congratulated themselves on so comfortable quarters being within their reach.

The old man did not come in at all; whether from a feeling of loneliness, that had betrayed itself in the latter part of his conversation, or from a sense of shame inherent in his nature, could not readily be determined.

An elderly gentleman was busily inspecting the baggage that was laid on the porch, and studying over and over again the initials, "W. H.," as if they might have some intimate relation to his business.

Seized with the idea that he could not be wrong, he hastened within the house, and accosted the landlord in a low voice:—

"Do you know whether one of the gentlemen in the other room is Mr. Humphreys?"

"Wal, no, I don't," said the other. "Is't the new minister you're expectin', deacon?"

"Yes. One trunk is marked W. H. I think that must belong to Mr. Humphreys."

"Like enough. If it does, he's in the other room."

"Which one is he? Can you tell?"

"I guess I can, deacon. Come, and I'll show you."

So the obliging host opened the door, and, after looking over the faces and persons of the three individuals carefully, finally remarked to the deacon that the one in the corner was the man who owned the trunk marked "W. H."

Deacon Burroughs entered the room, and advanced towards him, holding out his hand.

"Mr. Humphreys — is this?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the clergyman, rising, and offering to take the proffered hand.

"My name is Burroughs."

"Ah, Deacon Burroughs!" exclaimed Mr. Humphreys, a look of gladness breaking out over his fine face. "I have had a correspondence with you, and certainly *ought* to feel somewhat acquainted with you. I am very glad indeed to become personally acquainted."

And they shook hands heartily, the deacon replying to the compliment in his own honest way.

"Come, now!" said the latter; "just as soon as you get warm, we're going straight to *my* house. *I* shall take care of you for the present. I hope you will feel satisfied with what little we can do to make you comfortable."

Mr. Humphreys said he did not doubt that he should be made both comfortable and happy.

"Then you just sit down again," added the deacon, "while I run out and bring round my horse. Your trunks shall be put in the wagon at once; and when I come back, all will be ready. We can talk a little as we go along."

And Deacon Burroughs bowed his way out of the room, while the young clergyman resumed his warm corner at the hearth.

In a few minutes he rose to join his new friend, and wished his companions good day and a pleasant journey

forward. He stood in the door, ready to get into the vehicle.

Some one touched his arm from behind. He looked round, and observed the old man, his travelling companion.

"I hope you'll do well here," said the old man, in a half whisper, as if he would be confidential a little. "I haven't seen the man in a long time I wanted to know so much as I do you. You make me think of other days. I hope you'll do well—I do. God bless you."

Mr. Humphreys took his hand, and gave him an affectionate word of farewell, begging him to throw off the power of the habit that enslaved so fine a nature, and wishing him the best of fortune wherever his lot might carry him.

And in the old tavern door they separated.

Mr. Humphreys took his seat in the wagon, and was soon on the way to the heart of the little village.

CHAPTER II.

DEACON BURROUGHS' FAMILY.

"I WONDER if he *will* come to-day, mother. He certainly ought to be here by *this* time, if he means to preach next Sunday for us."

"Your father has been expecting him every day, all the week; but he hasn't come yet. I believe he went down with the horse and wagon this afternoon, to see if the stage brought him over. If he isn't there to-day, there'll be another disappointment."

"I wonder what kind of a *looking* man he is. I'm really curious to know."

"Why, Mr. Bard and Dr. Jennings, who went to hear him preach where he was hired for a few months, said he was a *fine*-looking man. That's all *I* know about it. But his sermons they were pleased with more than all. It's to be hoped that he won't disappoint any of us here. I guess, from all I can learn, too, that he won't."

"Do you expect he will board with us till next spring, mother?"

"That's the arrangement for the present ; unless he and Mr. Burroughs make some other, I suppose he will."

"Well, I for one shall be glad to have a new minister settled here. We've been obliged to do the best we could quite long enough ; and that's not been much above the poorest, sometimes. I hope Mr. Humphreys will suit and be suited."

"And I rather think he will, from what I hear. He comes to us with the first recommendations from those he's been studying under, and certificates of the very best scholarship. I guess he's a man of uncommon learning for one of his years."

There was a pause here, which each one of the speakers improved for a moment or two of thought. We will improve it likewise, to tell the reader who these persons, so much interested in Mr. Humphreys, were.

Lucy Burroughs and her mother, the daughter and wife of the deacon.

Mrs. Burroughs was not quite a woman to match the character of her husband, for — but no matter ; all this will duly come out in the course of the narrative. Lucy was different from either ; wholly herself, and no one else.

The room in which they sat looked unusually cosy and pleasant, especially by contrast with the gloomy appearance of things out of doors. The fire blazed brightly on the hearth, — it was long before the invention of those abominations known as "airtights," — and threw out a ruddy glow over the figures of the carpet, the chintz-covered easy

chair, and against the polished leaf of the table. The brass fire-dogs glistened like gold, looking full of wavering heat, and dancing jets, and waves of flame. Before the hearth was stretched a rug, somewhat faded in its colors, but soft and thick, upon which a large gray and white tabby cat lay dozing, filling the room with her drowsy purrings.

Such pleasant rooms — how few of them there are nowadays! Or if wealth exchanges snugness and comfort for empty and glittering magnificence, how few and far separated are the hearts that acknowledge their satisfaction with the change!

The brightly-polished shovel and tongs, — the little low mantel, on which stood the lamps and the snuffer tray, and over which hung a picture in needlework that Mrs. Burroughs had wrought in her girlhood, — the carpet, with its green and brown leaves, modestly winding themselves about the figures, — the easy chair, — the long settle against the wall, — the high, old-fashioned clock, ticking and clicking all the time in the corner, its voices echoing through the night along the passages and all through the rooms, — where are the pictures of home, in these gregarious times, that awaken one half the tender feelings in the human heart, or call up a fraction of those dear old associations that are so closely linked in with domestic peace, and happiness, and love? — feelings and associations that are intertwined with all these several objects, and centred nowhere so fixedly as at the quiet hearth and happy home.

Both mother and daughter were engaged in sewing. They did not often take their eyes from the work they were upon, unless to look thoughtfully for a moment into the fire, or to note the movements of the hands over the face of the old clock in the corner.

Lucy was a girl of decided sprightliness, and was not destitute of attractions such as readily hold the attention of the other sex. She was eighteen, already entered on her nineteenth year, — the favorite of her mother, as she additionally was her oldest child, — almost the sole mistress and manager of the household, — much given to social enjoyments, — and full of vivacity. Many a girl was there, in her day, who envied the appearance and the gifts of Lucy Burroughs.

The door suddenly opened, and in ran a younger sister, named Sarah.

“Look out of the window, Lucy! Look out, mother!” called she, speaking very naturally to Lucy first. “See who that is with father!”

Both ran, with their work in their laps, across the room, and held their faces a minute steadily against the corner of the window.

“I guess that must be the minister,” said the mother.

Lucy looked longer. She was surveying him with somewhat different eyes and thoughts, perhaps, than her mother.

“He’s young looking, mother,” said she, at length. “I thought he must be older.”

“No, Dr. Jennings said — don’t you remember, Lucy, the evening he spent here? — *he* said he was young, and that *I* should think he was handsome.”

“O, dear!” exclaimed Sarah, in a burst of childish delight, “I’m so glad he’s going to board *here*! I’m *so* glad!”

“Why, what difference can that make with *you*, I should like to know?” inquired her sister Lucy, looking round upon her with a searching glance.

“O, the girls at school will all have so many questions to ask about the new minister; and I shall be the only one that will know all about him. *Won’t* Emma Ray be vexed, though? and won’t I tease the Bards every day I live? For once in my life, I shall seem to know something that every body else doesn’t,” answered Sarah.

Deacon Burroughs came up through the front yard with the stranger, having tied the horse by a post at the gate, and entered the house. Bidding Mr. Humphreys come in with himself, they walked into the comfortable sitting room where Mrs. Burroughs and her daughters still were, and the deacon introduced him.

Mr. Humphreys expressed the satisfaction it gave him to reach Brookboro’ in safety, and to find such agreeable quarters ready provided for him. He likewise had a pleasant word or two for Lucy, and put Sarah a few questions concerning the school she attended, that soon sent her out of the room for her blushes in answering them.

“It’s been a very uncomfortable day for you to ride,” remarked Mrs. Burroughs. “I am glad your journey is over, really.”

"No more so than myself, I can assure you," returned he, with a slight bow in acknowledgment of her civility. "I like stage coaching very well, except when I am impatient, as I was a little to-day. The horses hardly seemed to creep, some of the way."

"It is not so pleasant a season for you to see Brookboro' for the first time as some other might be."

"The spring, for instance," said the deacon.

"Yes, or June. June is a lovely month."

"My first impressions of a place are very apt to be quite permanent ones," said the clergyman. "I believe those of most people are."

"They certainly are," said the deacon, warming his hands in the blaze.

"Yet I shall try and allow no wintry impressions of Brookboro' to get the better of the pleasanter ones you have desired for me. I really thought, as we were climbing over the hills to get here, that the village could not help being prettily located. I pictured it sleeping in the lap of the hills."

"It is something of that description," returned Mrs. Burroughs. "I think that is a very good picture of it."

The deacon assented in a short monosyllable, although he was by no means a man inclined to figures and images, but rather to the plainest and hardest practicalities.

"Lucy," said his wife, "Mr. Humphreys must be in need of supper by this time, and after so long a ride. Come, let us get supper at once."

Lucy rose immediately to assist in executing her mother's wish.

"And don't forget some cold chicken and other solid things," reminded the deacon. "A person wants nothing more than he wants meat, at such a time as this."

Mr. Humphreys smiled to be a witness of his host's thoughtfulness, and at once drew him into conversation about matters of parish and village interest. They had gone on talking for some moments. Mrs. Burroughs, in the mean time, had placed a bright tin teapot on the coals, for the tea to "draw" in, and Lucy was bustling about the room as lively as a cricket, setting out the table, and spreading over it the cloth, and arranging the waiter.

"By the by," broke out the deacon, slapping his knee, "I almost forgot the horse at the gate!" — and started from his chair. "And your baggage, too, Mr. Humphreys."

"Let me go out and help you," said the latter, getting up likewise. "I shall not allow you to take out my trunks alone."

"O, no, no; I've got a boy here. I can get help enough. You sit still by the fire, and get yourself as comfortable as you can. I'll soon have all the things in the house."

"Yes, you keep your seat, Mr. Humphreys," chimed in his wife.

So the latter reluctantly consented, and plunged his eyes thoughtfully into the fire.

Lucy, who was at his back much of the time, kept

casting curious and inquisitive eyes upon him as she moved quietly about, studying the shape of his head and the cut of his coat with all the interest of a hairdresser or a tailor. She was continually going out and in, bringing in the articles that were prepared for their supper. As her mother occasionally came in, too, she put an inquiry to Mr. Humphreys concerning his day's travel, or dropped some pleasant and sociable observation respecting the weather, the town, or the supper. But nearly all the time he sat there, Mr. Humphreys was taken up with his own thoughts chiefly.

Presently the deacon returned. He had a large, genial, good-humored face, that at once suggested a comparison with the blaze on the hearth.

"You are hurrying, I suppose, Lucy, with the supper," said he to his bustling daughter.

"It will be ready very soon now, father," replied she.

"We will try and make a sort of home evening of it, this evening, Mr. Humphreys," said the deacon, "and tomorrow, if you like, we will look about us a little. It's none too soft an air that's stirring out doors to-day."

Mrs. Burroughs soon after entered the room, busy with the adjustment of the new and clean cap she had just put on, and announced that supper was ready. It ought to have been, for her face was quite red enough with getting it.

They sat down, the deacon appealing to his guest to crave a blessing. It was a snug little picture, and the

clergyman thought it as pretty a family as he had seen. There were the deacon and his wife, — Lucy, Sarah, and Edward, — a younger brother.

On the table were laid the bounties of the year. Never, Mr. Humphreys thought, had he cut with the blade of his knife such deliciously tender chicken. Never saw he bread any whiter, nor honey any clearer. The deacon kept a few hives of bees, and knew their full value. The butter was like gold, and bore a quaint stamp of a serpent, twisting itself about something that was not quite so apparent. The tea revived him immediately, and seemed to give him fresh spirits.

This was the clergyman's first meal in the new place he had chosen for his labor. It certainly did not fail to bring up before his mind images of the many groups about the village tables, that, if he staid long with this people, he should be called on to witness and become a part of. Perhaps it set him to dreaming of the time when he should have a table and a circle all his own; at which thought his heart warmed suddenly, and his eye kindled, as if he tasted a new delight in the strong decoction he was so leisurely sipping.

After the evening meal was finished, they gathered around the hearth, the fire having been remodelled with another forestick and a handful of smaller pieces, and passed a long time in friendly conversation. Dr. Jennings came in, too, bringing Mr. Wilkinson, the preceptor of the academy, with him. Mr. Humphreys had seen the doctor

before, at the time the latter had made the proposal for him to preach for them a year at Brookboro'. He seemed an affable man, perhaps forty or forty-five years old, and full of a fund of intelligence and anecdote — just such a man as Mr. Humphreys thought he should thoroughly like.

Mr. Wilkinson was a reserved, a much more dignified person, observing silence oftener than the doctor, and much given to revery. Yet when he spoke, though it was with the greatest precision and particularity, he never failed to interest with what he said, no less than with his manner of saying it. He was not as old as Dr. Jennings; yet he looked quite as old, if not older. There was not that healthy, florid look in his face, suggestive of animal life and towering spirits, that was so apparent and so attractive with the doctor. He wore the face of the preceptor everywhere — a constrained and somewhat unnatural look, as if he might be oppressed with a sense of isolation from all around him.

After an evening spent very agreeably by all parties, and after many urgent invitations from both the teacher and the doctor for Mr. Humphreys to call at their houses as soon as he could make it convenient, the latter bade good night, and returned homewards.

Deacon Burroughs then assembled his household about the family altar, and offered prayers not less for the servant of the gospel who had come among them, than for all who were gathered that night beneath the roof.

Mr. Humphreys soon after wished all good night, and was shown to his room. As soon as he entered it, and had closed the door after him, he saw that his baggage had been safely deposited there, and the room put in complete readiness for his comfort. The carpet was soft; the curtains at the two windows were full and flowing, reaching almost to the floor; the little fireplace, with its bright fire-dogs, was ready for a fresh blaze; the bed looked so inviting, with its white curtains, and clean valance, and snowy tester.

The clergyman placed his lamp on the little stand, and fell down on his knees in a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving. He asked favor for all his labors upon which he was about entering. He prayed for strength from the Source of all strength when his own would be but feeble and inoperative. He commended the family to Heaven, and begged that the dew of righteousness might be shed on them all, as upon himself.

Wearied and worn with his journey, he fell finally asleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEN OF BROOKBORO'.

MR. HUMPHREYS found that he had really overslept himself in the morning, and did not wonder at it either. The sun was shining brilliantly in at his window as he pushed aside the curtain, and made the little apartment look as golden as an imperial palace.

After breakfast and prayers he returned to his trunks, and prepared to make a fire and put his room in order. His first thought was to settle down. When he had been able to attach his heart to some particular spot, like the roof of Deacon Burroughs, and the little chamber within and beneath that roof, he felt as if he should have some starting point from which to gradually make his departure over the parish. As yet his pastoral experience was nothing. He had been preaching but a few months, unsettled in his plans and determinations, and by no means doing justice by his labors to the sacred cause in which he had enlisted. Now, however, for a time at least, he would remain in a fixed position. He could concentrate all his

energies on a single object and purpose. A single parish was to be his care, and within that were his efforts mainly to be exerted.

So with these thoughts, and others like these, he proceeded to relieve his plethoric trunks, and to distribute his several articles of clothing in the drawers and the closet provided, and to take out the few needful books he had brought with him, as a sort of peripatetic library, and spread them over the table and bureau until such time as he could obtain some shelves; and to repair the fire, which he had succeeded in getting into a pleasant glow, and which lit up his room with a blaze as cheery and genial as any that ever danced up a chimney; and to arrange the table in one place, and the chairs in another — for he was a person a trifle fastidious in his tastes; and to adjust the two curtains so as to give him the pleasantest possible prospect out over the yard and the street, yet so as to avoid a wide-open, glaring look to the passer, as if he desired all the light there was and all the prospect he could get. In short, in the space of a very short time, he had given to his apartment such a snug home look that he stopped and half wondered if a gentler hand than his own could have done it any better.

He heard a knock, at length, on the door, and hastened to open it.

Deacon Burroughs stood before him.

“Well,” said the latter, “I’ve got through with *my* morning’s work; how is it with *you*, Mr. Humphreys?”

"O, walk in, walk in," replied the clergyman; "I didn't intend to do any *writing* to-day. I was only putting things 'to rights,' as the housekeepers say. Sit down, deacon; we will soon be ready for our little excursion over the village. That's what you came to remind me of, I suppose."

"Yes, sir; I thought we had better be going pretty soon. It's nearly ten o'clock."

"Is it possible? Well — well; but I have been so much occupied with getting out my things, and setting matters into a comeatable shape, that time has really slipped me. I could not have thought of its being so late as that. I'll get myself ready at once."

"I declare, how pleasant you look here! I almost envy you."

The deacon had the best of natural feelings, and these were now and then streaked with a narrow vein of imagination, or of something very like it. It looked as if he had just now allowed his heart to settle itself in a warm nest of comfortable associations, just as he settled his person in the capacious depths of the old arm chair.

"I am in hopes I shall have much of your company here this winter," returned the clergyman. "I shall need your counsel at every step."

The deacon pondered on the past and the future of the parish, and thought of what was most needed. Mr. Humphreys washed and dressed himself anew, and put himself in readiness to make the tour of the town.

As they emerged from the yard gate upon the street,

Mr. Humphreys turned about to latch the gate, and accidentally threw his eyes up at the house. A female figure suddenly started back from the window. If he gave himself a thought about such an apparition, he must have thought it was Lucy ; for it was she, as the deeply-colored face she carried for some time after fully testified.

They came immediately upon the village street.

“Which way?” naturally inquired Mr. Humphreys.

“This, I think, at first,” answered the deacon, pointing in a northward direction. “There is but little of the village below this, though the tavern is there. That is because the stages cannot run through the village street. The stores are here, and so is the post office. The academy is in this direction, too. It stands back from the street, on a high piece of ground. We will walk by it soon.”

The clergyman, as they went leisurely along, looked up and down, forward and backward, on this side and the other, all the way. It was a wide street, bordered on either side with grass, somewhat irregular in the method of laying out, but perhaps all the more picturesque on that account. The houses were all of wood, large and spacious, with door yards in front, and most of them fringed and set about with shrubs, and flowering bushes, and trees. A not unbroken row of elms lined the street, their giant arms stripped of foliage, and tossing and rolling hither and thither in the morning winds.

The street turned, as they progressed ; and some of the houses were set back farther than others, giving things a

still more irregular aspect. To the north the road lay among the hills that raised their crowns to the sky, and showed narrow and bleak on this morning in November. It opened to Mr. Humphreys' mind many thoughts of the dim and distant future, whose narrow and winding road he was just beginning to travel. It sent feelings vividly to his heart of the long journey he had yet to go; and he offered a silent prayer that he might reach the end of it with the whole of his little flock about him.

"There is the meeting house," said Deacon Burroughs, pointing towards it.

It was a substantial building, painted a pure white, without blinds on the outside, and surmounted by a tall, slender spire. The spire was really worthy of a prettier building. Wide steps of stone were placed before the three doors, and before them in turn stretched out a little sloping lawn of grass. There were large and roomy sheds built on either side of the meeting house, under which those who rode to meeting from a distance secured their horses during the services. A crooked-linked lightning rod climbed the side of the house, and pointed with its gilded finger above the tip of the spire to the deep-blue heaven.

Mr. Humphreys said but little. His thoughts were altogether his own. Not the outward and material appearance of things was he only studying, but the spirit and the reality of which every material object was but the type and manifestation.

At length they reached the store kept by Mr. Israel

Bard. Mr. Humphreys recollected that he was on the committee with Dr. Jennings to employ his pastoral services for the Brookboro' church.

They stepped within, and found Mr. Bard sitting by the box stove, engaged in reading a newspaper.

The latter rose to accost Mr. Humphreys, and shook hands cordially with him, offering him a chair. And all three sat down to a pleasant interchange of their feelings.

Mr. Israel Bard was a somewhat peculiar man, stamped after a decidedly individual fashion. He was slightly bald, and read his newspaper with the assistance of glasses. His occupation being that of storekeeper and postmaster together, and his accumulations from trade and saving being sufficient to establish him on a basis of village independence, he was naturally looked up to with a feeling of great respect, while his word, or his opinion, went as far as his that went farthest the whole country round.

He was a member of the church, and took a great interest in its temporal and spiritual welfare; but he did it after a style which he was unwilling to acknowledge any imitation or copy. Being as old a man as there was in town, at least among those who were considered the *solid* men of the town, he seemed to insist on receiving every particle of respect that was his due, while, in his turn, he kept people generally at such a distance from the circle of his feelings as compelled them to comply with his wish. He passed much of his time, if not the most of it, in his store, save during the summer, when it was passed chiefly about his farm lands and garden.

His family was large, consisting of a son, Joseph, and several girls, all of them much younger than their brother, and full of girlish life and vivacity. They constituted—the family of Mr. Israel Bard—quite an item in the little country parish, not numerically alone, but considered from the point of village influence and esteem.

Mr. Bard had every thing to say about church matters and matters pertaining to the general interests of the parish. He was the society's treasurer. He was made the safe repository of all the business, all the secrets, and all the prospects, until such time as, in his opinion, it might be practicable to divulge them.

While they sat about the stove, one and another of the villagers dropped in, to some of whom Deacon Burroughs introduced the new minister, every one of them seeming to feel cordially thankful that they had got an individual to become their pastor again. There was Mr. Upton, the honest and open-faced blacksmith, who had come in to provide a few articles in the grocery line for his family; and Mr. Sanger, the village lawyer, a man of an important, bustling, impressive air, who walked the floor continually, scrutinizing every object closely that came under his eyes; and Mr. Johnson, a good and worthy farmer, who held his hard hand a great while against the hot stovepipe, and said it was a “right smart” cold day, and looked as if he might know what was the exact meaning of a plenty to eat, and finally asked Mr. Bard what fresh eggs “were fetching,” and if he wanted any.

And so they came in and went out, almost a steady stream, for a long while. All appeared to be men of the truest simplicity of character, and of unquestionable sincerity of feeling. Their hands were hard, but it was with hard work ; they were not idlers in Brookboro', whatever they might be in some other places around them. The most of them were farmers, well to do in the world, regarding their calling with the deep respect in which it has been held since man was made to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, honest, straightforward, law-abiding men. A good community, surely, in which a new servant of the gospel might begin his devoted labors, where, if he could not always look for close sympathy, he might at least always claim attention.

Mr. Bard was a man of few words, and even those came with difficulty. He had a habit of hesitation and of very slow speech, as if he were giving each topic all the consideration it merited. In the way of business, he certainly belonged to an age at this time supposed to have gone by forever ; though abundant specimens of just such men are to be found, for the looking, in almost every country store where the trade is inconsiderable and the profits in proportion.

"Perhaps you will take dinner with me, Mr. Humphreys," said he to the young clergyman, looking over his spectacles.

Mr. Humphreys looked quickly towards Deacon Burroughs, to whom Mr. Bard still failed to extend the same

invitation. Deacon Burroughs coughed dryly, and said that, as they were merely going through the village, it would perhaps be as well if Mr. Humphreys put it off till some other day.

"I should be very glad to have your company," slowly rejoined Mr. Bard to the clergyman.

They finally withdrew, and proceeded farther up the street. Presently the deacon made a turn into what seemed a grassy lane rather than a road, and said they would just take a look at the academy. Putting a little more vigor into their walk, therefore, they soon climbed the gradual ascent to the spot where the building was located, and had a fine view of the whole village. The street lay for nearly its entire length before them. Where it was not itself traceable among the houses and between the uneven surfaces, the tops of the trees betrayed its shape and course. The white houses looked comfortable and pleasant, and suggested many of those delightful home feelings to the breast of the clergyman that are always active with persons of just such sympathies and mental predilections.

The academy, therefore, was somewhat off the road. The one that had been laid out near it, being a cross road only, led to the farms on the hills in the distance, and then to the next village. Built of wood, but of excellent proportions, the academy was an edifice of no inconsiderable importance in the appearance of the town. Every body spoke of it in a spirit of pride. It was at this time in the most satisfactory condition, the present teacher having

succeeded in establishing for it a character that was known far and wide over that part of the country. Of course, this served to bring strangers and pupils to Brookboro', which fact added much to the activity of village matters, as well as to the real character and standing of the place.

While he stood before the building, Mr. Humphreys could not help letting his thoughts carry him back to the earlier days, when he was in the enjoyment of luxuriant youth—that season when only the imagination is allowed action without constraint, and the hard realities of life are known only as pleasant varieties in the exciting play. The deacon kept talking of the prospect and of the place, warming with his subject as his honest heart always did, till he had wrought himself up to quite a pitch of enthusiasm; and all about Brookboro', and Brookboro' scenery and people.

Walking back to the village, — for it was quite noon, — they stopped a moment before the house of Dr. Jennings, who happened just then to be coming up.

“Good morning, Mr. Humphreys,” saluted he, with a cordiality that was contagious; “good morning, deacon. Come, you are exactly in time for me. Just my hour. Come—you'll walk in and dine with me. I shan't hear a word against it,”—here he put his hand on both gentlemen's arms,—“I shan't hear a single word to the contrary. Dinner's quite ready now. Come—walk in; walk in! Deacon Bourroughs, you know the way. At any rate, follow me, and I'll promise not to carry you wrong.”

They tried to hesitate and exercise a little deliberation upon it; but the doctor would not allow even this. He seemed to have a way of taking off people by main force, against their original wills, but generally to their after satisfaction. So in they went, and sat down in his large dining room. The doctor's wife came in, and then one of his daughters. The rest of his children were still at school.

A pleasant chat they had of it; and a pleasant hour, too, was that devoted to dinner. Mr. Humphreys felt as if he had learned more in that one hour about the real history and condition of Brookboro' than all he had known before. The doctor was so communicative, telling an apt story here, and rehearsing a characteristic matter there, — now appealing to the deacon for confirmation of what he said, or to draw out from his stores what did not happen to come uppermost in his own, — and all the time in the best flow of spirits with which to set off the whole. His family, too, appeared remarkably pleasant, and every thing appertaining to his household extremely well ordered. Dr. Jennings was, heart and soul, a thorough man. There seemed to be, as people sometimes say, no half way about him. If he attempted only to entertain you, he did it with all the energy and heartiness that would characterize his jumping into his sulky and driving off posthaste to attend a sinking patient.

And when dinner was over, and a little more time had elapsed afterward in which to sit and continue their run-

ning talk, they at length broke up their friendly conference, and Deacon Burroughs escorted Mr. Humphreys down the street on his way home again. They stopped, however, at the other store, to look in on Mr. Plimton—the keeper of the only other store in the village. And from this point they returned finally home.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST SABBATH.

IMMEDIATELY after supper, having already replenished his fire and placed his room in order, Mr. Humphreys excused himself to the family, and retired to the companionship of his own thoughts.

It was his first evening by himself in Brookboro'. He drew down the curtains before the windows, pushed the arm chair up near the table, took some manuscript sermons from his trunk, and seated himself for their perusal. He was getting himself ready for the performance of the duties of the next Sabbath.

But before he could fairly fix his attention upon the manuscript, his eyes wandered dreamily over the carpet, — over the walls, — into the blazing fire on the hearth; and his heart filled with feelings such as had hardly been a part of its experience before. He was trying now to settle himself down. Here was his work before him. This was his own snug apartment; there was the pleasant fire; these were his papers and books. To look forward

to the duties and the responsibilities of a pastor — that was no longer his privilege. He was right in the midst of his work already. He had put his hand to the plough; could he now look back, when the work stretched out so broadly before him? The sickle was ready to put into the bending harvest; could he stop to consider how hard was his labor, even if no other busy hand were to be detected in the whole field but his own?

And so thoughtful grew his mood, that he sat looking steadily into the fire for quite a'half hour, without being aware of the time that had so slipped away.

How many of the hopes of that half hour's dream were ever to be realized? How much of that half hour's pictured outline was ever to be filled in with living and breathing reality?

The sermons which he had selected for the next Sunday were, however, thoughtfully read over, and some trifling improvements made in them by his careful pen. He took his Bible from the table, and opened to the gospels, and there read and studied for an hour. And afterward he drew nearer to his fire, and gave himself up to the thoughts that his reading and the silence of his chamber combined to inspire.

A fervid prayer it was that he offered at the throne that night, awakening his nature as he rarely felt it aroused. He seemed to feel drawn up to Heaven in spirit by a cord of the most trustful and childlike love. All his hopes he laid before his Maker, and asked him to be witness to their

purity and truth. His burdens he prayed to have lightened when they might become too heavy for poor, weak, human nature to bear. He besought that he might become a true messenger to this people; that every unholy and worldly affection might be rooted out of his heart, and devotion to the interests of the gospel mission alone regulate his conduct and color his life; that unity might every where prevail within the field of his labors, each hand cheerfully helping its neighbor, and each heart leaning towards the other in affectionate sympathy; that the relation between pastor and people might be close, sweet, and altogether profitable; and that only the flowers of truth, and grace, and purity might be suffered to grow in this pleasant garden, the weeds of evil desires and passions being all choked and withered.

Only two days remained before Sunday. In that time he called twice at the house of Dr. Jennings, and once upon Mr. Bard, who took him in to see his family. Mr. Upton, too, he met again in the store, and liked his appearance more than ever. There was so much honest manliness, combined with womanly tenderness, in his nature, it could not fail to attract so observing and sympathetic a man as Mr. Humphreys.

The most of the time was passed in his chamber-study. His books were his chief companions. The deacon was out about his work nearly all the day, and the house below stairs was kept very still, with only Mrs. Burroughs and Lucy to make the noise, the other children being at school.

Some of the younger ladies of the village took occasion to call, ostensibly, and perhaps really, for the sake of seeing Lucy; but whether they did or not, it is certain that they hardly saw the new minister. He kept himself close.

Books! already he began to feel the need of them. If he could but be furnished with a well-filled library to his hand! — all the volumes of his own selection; with the familiar faces of all the old divines looking out from their shelves at him; with their richest treasures garnered for his enjoyment and profit. But so long as such was not his possession, he relinquished temporarily his wishes, and made up for the loss by a resolution to save enough to buy all he so earnestly coveted and needed.

Ah, how he yearned at times for the close sympathy of *one other heart*, — tenderer, purer, gentler than his own, — to which to communicate all his hopes and plans, and on which to lay half the burden of his feelings!

Those were but momentary desires — mere shadows of unexpressed wishes, that some day might come to take shape and form, and increase the store of his happiness. Such feelings, perhaps, would never have asserted themselves, except there had somewhere been some sweet face, that *would* keep looking lovingly into his own, bidding him take courage and press on, hoping, and struggling, and praying for the prize that glittered afar off, beyond the turbid waters of death, upon the plains of the new land that slept in the sunshine of heaven.

Sunday came.

It was a pleasant day, the sun rising clear and golden. He put aside the curtains of his windows at an early hour, and sat down to his devotional reading. To put himself in the proper frame of mind for his day's labor — that was what he wanted; to call about his thoughts just such a class of feelings, just such a train of associations, as would give them most effective power for the day; to banish worldliness, and shut out anxious care; to raise his heart upward and upward, while yet it was let down by its golden thread in contact with the hearts of those over whom he was called; to exalt, to ennoble, to purify; to see his way more clearly; to feel that the bright smile of God rested on his own heart; to feel that his lips might be touched with the live coal from the altar, — this, this was what he labored and wrestled with himself to achieve.

And when he went down to meet the family at the breakfast board, his serene and calm countenance bore ample testimony to the manner in which the bright Sabbath morning had dawned on his soul. There was an expression above that of mere humanity upon it, as if he had broken through the clouds and mists of doubt, and settled his gaze fixedly at last on the deep and fathomless blue of the heaven where he hoped to make his home.

His appearance in the pulpit was the signal for no little excitement in the congregation, as it very naturally would be. I need not speak of the eager eyes and the long-continued whispers, nor of the strained attention when he first rose in his place, nor the relapse into something more like

comfort afterwards. These phenomena are to be seen in all churches on occasions like this; because they are exhibited in so candid and honest a way in country churches, it is the mistaken opinion that they are to be found nowhere else.

The congregation was quite large, considering the chilliness of the morning and the distance many of them were obliged to come; but it was not a common occasion. A new minister was in the pulpit; and the plain thinkers were impatient to know at once whether they were to like or dislike him, or to be indifferent to him altogether.

It is human nature — and by no means necessarily a weak betrayal either — to be impressed with fine appearances. As Mr. Humphreys stood up before them, therefore, there is little wonder that they imperceptibly felt impressed with his looks. Few were there who would have failed to be attracted to such men. In the first place, his countenance wore an expression of high and living intellectuality. A little pale with study, — though this bracing country air would soon send the blood where it was needed, — he challenged the sympathies of some, perhaps, as much as he did their admiration.

He read the chapter from the Bible in a clear, subdued voice, as if its import thrilled every fibre of his heart. His tones went over the old meeting house like the voice of something more than of a mere man, so earnest and fervid were they.

Prayer succeeded, in which, for the first time, the hearts

of this people went up with his own to Heaven. He commended them and himself to the care and keeping of the Almighty, and besought that his Spirit might breathe upon them all, and the grace of his love unite them in bonds that time could never break asunder. The interests of the church were especially commended to the keeping of Heaven, and blessings besought for them through all time to come.

Then followed singing — singing by a well-trained country choir. What can be plesanter to the simple and child-like heart? What can be a richer feast for the meek and devotional spirit, carrying up its petition and praise together on a single wave of exulting song to the regions of immortality? The clergyman joined in singing the hymn, his feelings mounting as on wings in the strong enthusiasm of his soul's devotion.

The morning sermon was from the text, Luke vi. 46: "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" The theme was, the necessity of *practical* goodness over every theory and all the mere precepts that may be advanced.

The method of his treatment, while it was somewhat novel and original, was still none too much so to work the effect designed. From beginning to end, however, the burden of the discourse was practical goodness — practical goodness. He rebuked the multitudes of those who conformed to the *theory*, but knew nothing of the *substance*; held their real characters up to the light of God's truth,

and showed how flimsy and transparent they were, and enjoined it forcibly and most earnestly on every one within his hearing to remember that he or she received a gift at the beginning, which must in some way be employed, and which Christ had demanded for the holy and exalted service of the common Father.

The intermission was of an hour's duration. The most of those who had come from a distance gathered in the rooms of the Widow Thorn, whose house was but a few steps off, where the whole subject of the morning's service was duly brought forward for discussion. This was the favorite habit of those who frequented the place of a Sunday noon; and not unfrequently matters were then and there passed upon that carried their influences all through the succeeding week; or items of general news collected and collated that made quite a scrap book, to be read and read over again hereafter.

In the afternoon, the people came together punctually at the hour. Mr. Humphreys was soon in his place, his face expressive of some anxiety, yet, on the whole, as calm and placid as the morning had witnessed it.

His afternoon text was from a verse in Revelation: "And there shall be no more sea."

Using the word sea as a figure of the imagination, he represented that all were on the wide sea of life, bound, in hope at least, to one common haven. This waste of sea was tempestuous, and difficult of navigation. There were islands scattered and grouped about in its bosom, some of

them so bright and sunny that little was the wonder they enticed many to their short and insecure repose by the way ; but these gems of the sea were not the lands of the promised rest. That was where waves no longer beat ; where the roar of dashing waters was no more to be heard ; high and clear from all reach of the tempests ; on sunny plains ; by pleasant streams ; and in the midst of smiling pastures.

This voyage of life he depicted with all the skill of which he was master. He painted the vessels in which one and another embarked — trusting to fortune for a pleasant sail, some of them, and some careless in what they set out, if they could but get out upon the water. He pictured those scenes of horror and despair, when one frail craft after another is swamped in the billows, —

“ Youth at the prow, and pleasure at the helm,” —

with not the sign of a compass on board, no knowledge of the waste, heedlessness having control, and destruction soon rising to claim the whole precious freight for itself, and still opening its jaws for other victims bent on just the same career. He dwelt on those virtues — of prudence, of watchfulness, of complete trust in the great God of the storms — as necessary to carry one through the voyage in safety, and warned those whose trust was in nothing but their youth, their spirits, and their individual strength, of the hazards upon which they so recklessly were venturing, and the whirlpools that were yawning to draw them down to their early ruin.

“ ‘And there shall be no more sea,’ ” repeated he, at the close. “How comforting a thought to the weary, tempest-tossed mariner ! No more sea ! What blessed news to him whose heart has buffeted the waves of misfortune, and malice, and affliction all his days ! What a sweet assurance to those whose faint cries had always gone up against the storm, like that of the unbelieving Peter, ‘Save, Lord, or we perish !’ ”

People liked the new minister from the first. In a body the inhabitants of quiet little Brookboro’ received him into their hearts, and inwardly hoped he would tarry with them while his labors might to him and to them seem profitable.

CHAPTER V.

REMINISCENCES.

I HAVE been describing the event of Mr. Humphreys' arrival at Brookboro', together with the first impression his appearance created among the people. If the kind reader will allow, I will in a single chapter give a sketch of his earlier days, of his friends, and of the circumstances with which he found himself now surrounded.

It is so true that there is no pleasure in this world without some pain, no goodness unless closely yoked with a power of evil, no flattering promise without a worm in the bud to gnaw straight to its heart. It is so ordered of Heaven, all for the wisest and best of purposes, that the two principles of good and ill, of joy and sorrow, of light and darkness, shall not be set over against one another, but be so intimately mingled and mixed together—one intertwining the other with a show even of affection—as that the influence of the better shall be able, in time, to eradicate that of the worse, and out of contrasts and contrarieties of the most violent character a true and beautiful order shall

be established, promising to endure when every thing material shall have faded away.

Little, perhaps, would any one have thought that Mr. Humphreys' situation was apropos to this observation ; yet, in one sense, it certainly was. Let us look back upon his history.

His father was a lawyer, in the town of Briarfield, — not more than sixty or seventy miles distant, — a man of wealth and standing, proud and imperious, impatient of another's will than his own, and determined in all cases, if within the limits of possibility, to carry forward his individual plans and projects to a successful issue. To be balked in any thing he had set his mind upon, was to have his fiercest resentment kindled against the one through whose instrumentality such a result was wrought. He had been quite successful in his professional pursuits, having built up for himself a name widely known and respected, and amassed fortune enough to place his family in circumstances of the greatest comfort and independence.

He was not a pious man, although at times his heart betrayed outwardly symptoms of a religious tone of thought and feeling. To attend church regularly every Sabbath, and lend his countenance by his presence to the institutions of religion ; to observe with strictness all the forms and ceremonies that a high public morality required ; to be charitable on occasion, as much because others were as for any specific feeling that could be said to move him to duty ; to follow his pursuits strictly ; to be a peaceable neighbor

and a good citizen, — this was his standard for a man's life, and it was that to which he had endeavored steadily to conform his own conduct and actions.

Briarfield was a sweet village, and Esquire Humphreys' mansion was the finest of any in it. It was a somewhat spacious building, standing back a little from the street, with a beautiful lawn-like yard, set about with trees and shrubs, and walks neatly bordered with box, with four large rock maples spreading their dark shadows over the edge of the road, and seeming to half hide the house in summer with their deep masses of foliage — a house quite after the olden style of architecture, with a wide hall, and large chimneys, and roomy chambers, with large, deep fireplaces, and large beams running across the ceiling, and the old-style, inside shutters; a mansion, in short, where one could, at this day, live over again the associations and feelings of the past, dreaming in the ancient chambers, wandering thoughtfully through the high rooms, and holding pleasant companionship with the fancies and memories that peopled garret, and chamber, and hall.

Here had William, the young clergyman, been born. If any place seemed home to him, it certainly was this. Here he had passed the bright and careless days of his youth; and here were all those old, familiar objects with which his feelings were so closely intertwined.

There had been but two children — William, and his younger brother, James. Different as possible, when boys, in nearly all their qualities and characteristics, the distance

between them was still wider now that manhood had developed their natures. William, when a boy, was gentle in his disposition, more like his mother than his father. He was thoughtful, beyond what was common in one of his years, for every body and every thing. Winning in his ways, and seeking rather to be loved by others than merely to make some decided impression upon them, he seemed more the girl in his nature than the boy, though there was no lack of proper manly traits, which, in abundant time, would assert their part and influence in his character.

James was in all respects the opposite. He was only two years and a half younger than his brother, yet he looked his elder by more years even than that. He was bold and ready in every emergency, with more masculine manners, and much less regard for the feelings or the opinions of others. His boyish sports were different. He was ruder, and liked noisier amusements, and rarely was found quiet or backward where any thing capable of interesting him was going on. He sometimes took a secret delight in teasing William by trying the placidity of his temper, and throwing obstacles in his way when he least expected them. At school and at home it was ever the same. The same marked difference divided these two youthful characters, that, as years came on, would mature them into characters more widely different still.

If either of them could be said to be the favorite son of his mother, William was that one. She saw in him the

reproduction of her own finer feelings and sentiments. She watched closely the unfolding of the flower, and was made glad to find it wore tints and colors that had long been the favorite ones of her own heart. It is an indescribable feeling, this that attends upon a mother's study of the character of her child ; that swells in her heart, as she searches carefully in the yet unformed character, and finds new treasures and new developments each day ; that brings tears to her eyes, as she discovers one and another trait that attracts all her warmest sympathy, because she knows that same trait to be thoroughly her own.

Boyhood gave and left them individual characters in their native village. They went through the regular course of schooling together. They studied at the same books, and contended for the same advancements in their classes. William was much the better scholar, however, as he was the more persevering student. He graduated from the village academy, well prepared to enter college and take a high stand among those with whom he would be called to associate and compete.

This his proud-minded father knew, and this he carefully kept in his mind. It had long been his plan to send William to college, as it was likewise his purpose to educate him to follow the pursuits of his own profession ; yet, while he kept the former continually before his son, he was judicious enough to refer to the latter only by occasional and timely hints, that might be taken in a serious sense, or might not be thought to mean any thing at all. It was

much too soon yet for William to have thoughts of a profession thrust upon him ; and his father well knew it. His mind had not taken any particular bent, so that his feelings and his resolution were ready to follow no prepared course. If he did have secret inclinations towards any calling, his father, at least, knew it not. No one did. The boy hardly dared believe, as yet, that he entertained them himself.

But before his school days were over, and about a year and a half before he thought he should be ready to enter college, William had the great misfortune to be bereft of her whose guidance and influence were invaluable to a nature just like his. It was a terrible event for the whole household ; as well, too, for the church and the village. Mrs. Humphreys was a woman of the most fervent and exalted piety, and had held the heart of her family to a religious tone of feeling at times when there might have been no such characteristic in their entire nature. She won her way by the practice of those gentle virtues that betoken the truly pious woman, coloring her daily life with hues such as no merely earthly light could bestow, holding forth for the eyes of her husband and children an example of great meekness, and trust, and humility, and endeavoring, rather by a course of religious conduct than by precepts alone, to impress upon them the beauty and the peace, as well as the necessity and safety, of a life that was devoted to Heaven.

It was she who first taught her children to pray. O the deep and lasting influence that a mother exerts on all the

busy and troubled afterlife ! How vividly come up again those moments to the man's eyes when he used to kneel at his mother's side and go with her to the throne of grace ! How plainly again in after years are heard those same saint-like tones that once sunk so deeply into the heart, and drew the child as by syllables of love into the path of righteousness and well doing ! Is there a memory in all the life of a man sweeping over heart and brain with such quick and lasting power, rousing the thoughts from worldly lethargy to loftier points of activity, and bringing out, in a single moment as it were, the whole of the goodness and tenderness of the soul to the surface—like the memory of a mother's prayer, when the man was the innocent child, sheltered and caressed by her love ?

William had staid home from school that day, because he thought he might be of service to his mother ; and passed his time in watching by her bed, and running to perform the trifling errands, and weeping. The tears, however, were shed in secret. He could not have pained her he loved so much as by betraying the whole of his grief.

For many weeks she had been sick ; and at first no one thought of the issue to which her disease was tending. Mr. Humphreys was anxious and attentive ; he let no occasion go by unimproved when he could either allay her suffering or add to her happiness. The doctor entertained no immediate fears, but hoped that, with careful nursing, all would finally come out well.

Yet Mrs. Humphreys herself had a different presenti-

ment from the beginning. A belief had at an early period of her sickness taken possession of her mind that she would never recover. It did not seem to depress or prey on her spirits at all, nor to render her conversation in the least degree unpleasant and gloomy. It was with a cheerful courage that she faced the worst, just as calm and collected at the certain approach of her end as if she were only to set out on a short journey, where there were beloved friends to meet and greet her at the close.

On this particular day she had failed perceptibly and quite rapidly from an early hour in the morning. The doctor was at the house nearly all the time. The tables in the sick chamber were covered thickly with vials, and bottles, and teacups, each with different mixtures, and all to bring her some slight relief from her suffering. The atmosphere was close and stifled, as nothing but the air of the sick room can be used to describe it. The curtains were down, or nearly so, and the room darkened. All about the house brooded a silence that was painful.

Mrs. Humphreys had been talking calmly and happily with her husband, who sat at her bedside holding her hand. He was deeply affected, although his heart was unwilling to believe that this endeared bond of earthly affection must be broken. The tears stood in his eyes, and that was all; he never wept; he never gave way to violent exhibitions of feeling. His breast heaved, as if he were going through a mighty struggle with himself to yield up this precious partner so soon. He kept his eyes fixed on the face of his

wife — never speaking, only gazing in a rapt and deep silence. And she continued talking with him tenderly and seriously of the things of the world she was about entering, and comparing their worth with the worthlessness of all things here, and beseeching him in her most earnest and saint-like manner to think more of his destiny and of the vast future that stretched before him, and strive patiently to run the race towards the goal of life. She was perfectly self-possessed through it all ; he was the one who displayed the most emotion. Her anxiety and his were of two entirely different natures. She was minding the high, he only the low, estate. There was the difference that dwells between things earthly and heavenly.

She motioned for her boys to be called in, that she might address her dying words to them. Mr. Humphreys went out immediately and sent in William to his mother. The maid ran over to the academy for James.

And now William and his mother were alone ; alone together in this chamber of sickness and death. He came in and stood by her bedside. The moment he caught her dying eye and her faint smile his feelings overcame him utterly, and he buried his head in the pillow and wept. For a moment his mother did not attempt to control him ; it was better that the tears so long pent up should finally flow and relieve him.

“ William,” said she at length, laying her thin hand on his head, “ my son, you must listen to all I have to say to you now, for you will very soon be without a mother.

Do not weep, my child ; it is for our good that these afflictions are sent to us all. Perhaps you will be of more service in our common Father's cause if I am taken from you now. I might be a hinderance to you. My love might take away from your love for God. Think of this, my son, when I am gone, and try to think that you can love your heavenly Father the more since your mother has been taken into his fold above."

"O mother!" exclaimed the agonized boy, "how *can* I live after you are dead? How *can* I?" And he tried to look at her through eyes that were swimming with tears.

She soothed him with a voice and words yet more pleasant than before, and, still keeping her hand upon his hands, talked to him, in a way he could understand, of the real aims one should set before him in life, and the motives that ought to breathe in his conduct.

"You were not placed here, William," continued she, "simply for the gratification of your own desires and pleasures. You are not your own director and master. You must not expect only to pursue your own plans and projects. There is another than yourself, who has endowed you with all these faculties which you possess, and who has intended and promised that you should earn happiness only by the right *use* of them. There is no happiness, that is real and true happiness, in the mere following of your own desires ; none in only selfish pursuits ; none in merely earthly pleasures. You can be happy only as you obey the wishes of your Father and make happy all around you. This

is every one's mission. It is yours. And you do wrong if you think to avoid it, or wish that you might get your reward without your labor."

She paused a moment for strength, and then concluded:—

"William, you must learn to do without a mother, sad as it is. You must learn to cast all your cares upon, and carry all your griefs to, your heavenly Father. He will tenderly watch over you. If you are scourged and corrected at times, search your heart so much the closer, and try to understand what it is that most needs rooting out. O William, my son! if I could but die in the assurance that you would devote your life to the service of Heaven, to spreading the knowledge of the blessings and the promises, how much *more* happy would be the death bed to me then!"

William could only weep at her words; he offered no reply. They were sinking deeply, deeply within his young heart.

And James came in; and to him his dying mother addressed similar words of love and pious consolation. She pointed out to him the true way to life, and besought him to walk forward in that until called to meet her in happiness again. The scene was affecting beyond description—she so calm, and the others weeping and sobbing as if their hearts would break with the bereavement.

Alas! alas! few greater losses are there in this world for a boy than the loss of his mother. He knows it not at the time, broken hearted as he may appear. The spirits gather

themselves again soon, and the sore wound in the feelings closes and heals; but the sweet and secret influence is gone, as if a part of the nature were blotted out; the deep and silent power is taken away that would have easily moulded his plastic character as it pleased, and fitted it for any of the places that are most valuable in their effects upon the world's people.

It was just at sunset, at the close of a clear and bland day in the spring, when the dying wife and mother called faintly for more air and to be lifted in the bed. They raised a window and fanned her. She cast her eyes around upon them all, — husband, children, and attendants, — a sweet smile broke out over her face, her lips murmured something of “home” and “heaven,” and her breath ceased. There were no strugglings, no dying groans, no painful throes. All was as placid and unruffled as the surface of a sweet dream. The life had not died out; it had only passed away. Earth was exchanged for heaven.

They stood for a moment looking fixedly upon her countenance. There might have been a gleam of hope that they were closely watching. But it flickered, and fluttered, and vanished. She was dead. And a husband was without a wife, and children without a mother!

When, a year and a half later, therefore, in obedience to the original intentions of his father, William entered college, it was with a heart still shaded with sadness for the loss of his mother, and spirits sensibly toned down to a temper of thoughtfulness and sobriety.

He soon took a high stand in his class, and steadily kept it. In the recitation room, in the society rooms, at the club, and among his instructors, he was every where known as an indefatigable student and the conscientious companion. His talents were unanimously acknowledged, and that without envy. This was much more than was usual. He bore off some of the first prizes, and apparently without effort or exertion. And it came to be understood that his ambition had so little selfishness about it, that others yielded up their claims before his with a cheerful assent to his superior merit, that was worth far more to him than all the prizes and marks of honor in all the colleges in the world.

Carrying ever in his heart the impressions created at the death of his mother, and remembering every syllable of the last words she uttered in his hearing, he made it his practice to attend regularly on all the religious meetings both of his own class and of the students in a body; at which times he felt that influences were working their way into his character that had the effect greatly to purify his ambition and turn his thoughts into channels in which they had not been in the habit of directly moving. The custom was a proper one, and he continued it till it became a downright pleasure. He would sooner think of foregoing any other pleasure than of relinquishing a privilege he esteemed so highly.

All through his course at college his conduct was marked by the same thoughtful sobriety and conscientiousness. He kept his place as a scholar, and even advanced upon his

first standing, others falling gradually behind. And during the last year of the collegiate course, he united with the church. He had written to his father of his feelings, in the course of other matters, but the latter made no other than a general and evasive reply to that subject. It was one he had never been in the habit of talking upon to his family, and he felt unwilling to begin with it now. So William Humphreys was left to his own strength and the guidance of Him before whom he laid all his wants.

Ah, it was so sweet now to think of his mother, and to think that she still watched him with the eyes of her sainted spirit from above; to feel that his sympathies moved now in an unbroken circle, and not forward and backward, forward and backward in the segment they only had traversed before! His heart was healthier, and its feelings deeper, and broader, and truer. And this was but the beginning of this long life of serenity and peace.

He took one of the highest honors at commencement, though little comparatively cared he for the mere triumph connected with such a gift. He felt that his ambition was above it. His aims were set higher than on the pinnacles of temporary fame, however much they might be gilded for the eyes of others. A complete and thorough renovation of his character had been effected. Through God's grace he had come off more than a conqueror.

His father was present to listen to his performance on commencement day with a heart buoyant with pride. So that *his* son did creditably, not less to his father than to

himself, he was satisfied. He came there expressly to partake in the triumph. It was a scene that fed little else than his pride; and the maw of this monster was frequently insatiable.

The excitement finally past, the diploma received from the hands of the venerable president, the old rooms deserted, and the home spot once more regained, William Humphreys resolved in his mind the next step, upon which he had long ago determined. He had not acquainted his parent with it, because that parent seemed hitherto deaf to every thing he had to communicate on the subject. Yet, although his purpose had been kept to himself, it had by no means lain dormant in his breast. He had formed it with care, and after patient thought and prayerful watchings. He could not think of entering upon it with haste, nor until long deliberation had finally settled upon its propriety in his mind.

So after many weeks had elapsed, and the temporary excitement incident to commencement day and the breaking up of all the old college ties had in some degree abated, the young man took occasion, one afternoon, to enter the library where his father was engaged in running over his books, and lay before him all his intentions.

His mind was settled on studying for the ministry. He had given the subject patient and prayerful thought, and now his resolution was taken. It was proper, he premised, that a resolution of so much importance be communicated to his father without further delay.

"A minister!" — that was the first ejaculation of Mr. Humphreys, as he turned round on his son.

For some time he was dumb, possibly with the shock such a declaration had given his more worldly and selfish pride.

"I had never *thought* of such a thing!" said he, at length. "I had all along designed you for the law. You were to step right into the practice I have been for years accumulating. I meant that you should commence reading as soon after you graduated as possible. A *minister*! No — *no* — NO!" And again he relapsed into silence.

But William, while he certainly deferred to every reasonable wish of his parent, felt that his own individual convictions were too firmly rooted to be shaken either by the pride or the passion of another. In almost any thing else, whether whim or wish, he would have been trebly glad to gratify his father; but in this he *could not*.

And they remained in the library for at least two hours, talking the subject over, William ever appealing to the better nature of his parent, and the latter insisting on nothing but the gratification of his own pride and pleasure.

They separated, Mr. Humphreys in a fit of uncontrollable rage, declaring that he never would have been at the expense of sending his son to college had he foreseen this sudden overthrow of his dearest hopes, and boldly threatening to cut off all future acquaintance with him if he persisted in thwarting his plans; William seemingly more serene and self-possessed than when he first entered the

room, begging his father to listen to the voice of reason, not to be carried away by his impulses, and not to be ruined by his foolish pride.

But the purpose of the son was not of a nature to be overthrown or put aside. It was not obstinate, though it was firm. And the pride of the father was a bow that had never yet been taught to bend ; and to bend now was what it would not do. The consequence is briefly related. Unless William relinquished his determination, he must leave his father's house, and never expect to call it home again. More than this, he would be cut of from all share of the inheritance that would otherwise belong to him. For the latter he cared really little. It was not so easy to think seriously of leaving forever the dear old spot where he was born, where he had passed his childhood years, where he had first learned to love God, and where he had seen his own mother die.

Mr. Humphreys, however, was immovable. While his son's presence daily added to his thoughts of disappointment and his feelings of chagrin, his obstinacy found abundant fuel with which to feed itself ; when he should be gone, this flame might die gradually away, and leave him the use at least of his reason. So William argued ; and he resolved to take his departure as soon as possible.

Let the remainder be told in a few words. He procured an academy in a town some twenty miles off, and entered upon his new duties of preceptor. The name of the town was Thornton. Here he taught for nearly three years, studying theology with the village minister the while. At

the end of that time he commenced preaching, having duly obtained a license—at first in such churches as did not enjoy stated preaching, and finally at Brookboro', where he had been hired for a whole year.

In all this period he had never once been home. His father and brother were strangers to him, the latter through no cause of dislike, but simply to humor the passion of a parent whose whole estate was to come into his possession. And *this* was the end of that brotherhood, begun far back in infancy, continued through years of innocent childhood, and at last sundered like a bond that was held together by nothing stronger than money, and prejudice, and passion. O ye proud and unreasonable fathers, who seek to carve out for yourselves the fortunes and the eternal destinies of your sons, pause ere you lay rude hands on work that only God, the Father of both parent and child, can do. Arrogate not to yourselves the part of One who sees not as man sees, whose thoughts are wide and high as eternity, whose plans were laid before the years were, or before existence with you began.

This was the outline of the young clergyman's life. He had been called to pass through much; but how many bravely endure and court the endurance of more! In the quiet little village of Brookboro' he had finally begun seriously his lifelong work. It might be—he knew not—that here he was to perform his entire labor, and here, at last, surrender the trust back to Him from whom it had been received. He would labor as if this was his only chosen field.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS BUSS.

MR. HUMPHREYS came down from his chamber to tea one afternoon, and Luey presented herself as he opened the door. The clergyman saw that there was a person in the room to whom he was a stranger, and naturally threw a glance back to Luey.

She looked rather roguish, and her mouth betrayed a half smile.

"Miss Buss — Mr. Humphreys," said she, nodding in the direction of her visitor.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Humphreys," said that individual, rising with quite an abrupt start from her chair, and stepping forth briskly with extended hand. "Happy to see you, sir. Well, I s'pose? Happy to see you, sir."

Our little parish was a mosaic of individual characters, and I shall be allowed to bring them all forward in the order these simple annals seem to require. I shall try to sketch only after nature, without a dream of malice or a thought of levity. In the limits of this diminutive circle

were to be found all the hopes, and plans, and motives, and activity common to humanity every where. The daily and yearly experiences of these simple hearts, therefore, may be taken as an epitome of the experience of human hearts the world over. They are really so. And these annals are little less than pressed leaves in the book of recollection.

Mr. Humphreys sat down for a moment by the hearth before the deacon came in. Mrs. Burroughs was already pouring the tea.

"Sit up to the table, if you please, Mr. Humphreys," said the matron. "Mr. Burroughs told us not to wait for him if he wasn't here by this time."

"Sit here, Miss Buss, if you please," directed Lucy, placing a chair for her across the table from Mr. Humphreys, while she appropriated her father's place to herself.

"Yes," replied that lady, quite stiffly, as she walked still more stiffly to her seat, throwing a bundle of arrowy glances at Mr. Humphreys by the way.

A blessing was besought, and Miss Buss proceeded to adjust her handkerchief in her lap exactly to suit her; while at every convenient or inconvenient moment she looked over at Mr. Humphreys, and then dropped her eyes innocently to her lap again. When it was shaken out of its folds just as she thought it should be, she took her cup of tea from Mrs. Burroughs, and instantly grappled with her handkerchief, raising it to her mouth, and coughing quite softly behind it, and throwing another glance or two over at Mr. Humphreys.

"Will you take a biscuit?" said Lucy, passing them.

"Thank you ; I'm *very* fond of biscuits," returned Miss Buss, "especially *your* biscuits, Miss Burroughs," meaning Mrs. Burroughs by the motion of her head.

"I don't have as good luck at some times as I do at others," explained Mrs. Burroughs.

"You certainly were fortunate *to-night*," offered Mr. Humphreys, who had taken a large bite from his own.

"Are *you* fond of biscuits, sir?" asked Miss Buss, looking straight at the clergyman, as if she were curious to know the exact shade of his eyes.

"I am, very," said he, and another piece melted in his mouth, in testimony of the truth of his admission.

"Now, do tell me ! Well, I call *myself* quite a hand at baking. Really, you will have to come over and try *my* skill some time."

Lucy colored a little at being a witness to so open an invitation, and looked at her mother. Mrs. Burroughs, however, seemed trying not to notice what was said, begging Mr. Humphreys to help himself to butter, and asking Miss Buss if her cup was out.

"No, it isn't, I thank you," answered the lady, smiling very hastily on her hostess, and directing her attention immediately to the clergyman again.

"Let me see," said Mr. Humphreys, laying down his knife ; "I hardly think I know where your house stands. On *this* side of the street ?"

"O, *no*, indeed ! Why, you don't know ? Is it possible ? I thought *every body* knew that."

"But I am only a stranger here, you know."

"Yes, yes; I didn't think of that when I spoke. So you are all very excusable, sir. Well, I'll *tell* you where I live; it's with my sister, sir — that is, with my brother's wife; and with my brother, too, I 'spose, for *that* matter, for he lives with his own wife. Ha! ha!"

The clergyman was waiting to hear about the locality of the mansion alluded to.

"O la, I forgot again that you didn't know my brother," said she. "He was a sayin', only this very day, how that he *wanted* to know you very much, he'd heerd so much about you. He hasn't been to meetin' yet, you see; but he *means* to come. They've had such changes here in Brookboro', and so many new ministers, too, he didn't know what they'd finally make their minds up to. He means to wait till they've pitched on to somebody *for good*. That's *his* cut out; and I can't exactly find it in my heart to blame him, either. Well, my brother thought *he* couldn't get over at present, so he said he guessed *I'd* better come; and so I did. He wanted to hear about the minister all he could, you know."

Mr. Humphreys nodded a sort of half-vexatious nod. Mrs. Burroughs glanced at him, and asked him to take another cup of tea; and Lucy looked at her mother, and at Miss Buss, and at Mr. Humphreys, one after the other.

"The house is on what's called the 'back road,' " ventured Lucy, with a view of keeping the threads of the conversation a little together.

"O, yes," broke in the visitor again. "It's rather a lengthy walk there, sir; but I guess you couldn't miss the way."

Mr. Humphreys bowed, and was going politely to accept her invitation to call there.

"A *red* house, sir, it is," she interrupted, holding her cup in her hand, and lifting up her face until it showed fuller and more crimson than ever. "Left-hand side, — a little back from the road, — and a wood pile a little one side o' the buildin'. You can't miss it if you try. I'm sure *my brother* 'll be glad to see you, and so'll his wife, and so shall I; and we'll try and make you comfortable, though we don't pretend to be quite such good livers as Deacon Burroughs' folks be. *They* live on *the street*, you know. Quite a difference! *We're* off the post road entirely; never see nobody, except when we come to meetin', — and that hasn't been very steady, lately, — or when somebody comes over there. But I'm *goin'* more *now*; we've got a new minister, and I tell folks it makes a great, a wonderful sight of difference in my feelings. And it does, you may depend on't. If you'll come over, sir, my brother Ned'll give you all the talk you'll want, I'll warrant you. He'll talk every thing, and about every thing. Sometimes I tell him, just to stop him, you know, he'll tire *me* out, and all the rest of his friends, too. But you must come over, sir, and see him, and see us all, for yourself. He'll give you good talk, and a plenty of it."

Mr. Humphreys tried to reply to her. First he began

at one end, and then at the other, and then he essayed the middle. It was all a snarl and confusion to him. However, he could do no less than promise to improve an opportunity for making a visit whenever it should offer.

"Perhaps I'll walk over with Miss Lucy, some afternoon, and take tea with you," said he.

"Yes, or with her father, either. He and my brother are good friends, I believe."

Another exchange of glances between mother and daughter, which Mr. Humphreys this time himself saw, much to their confusion.

Miss Buss passed her cup three times for tea, and begged Mrs. Burroughs not to add much cream—she liked it pretty strong. So it would naturally appear, if her voluble tongue were to be cited in proof.

"I was afraid you would think I kept you waiting for your supper," said Mrs. Burroughs, addressing her boarder. "I had to wait a little for Mr. Burroughs."

"O, not at all, madam," he replied. "I was quite too much engaged to think of the next meal, I assure you."

"Writing must be very *exhaustin'*," offered Miss Buss, unwilling to be kept out of the conversation. "Seems to me I've heerd folks *say* so."

"Possibly at times it is," assented the clergyman. "I was not engaged in writing this afternoon, however."

Miss Buss stared at him, as if to know what other kind of work ministers *had* to do. She said she thought they wrote all the time, and that was all they did.

"Pretty poor sermons some of them would be, I fear," said Mr. Humphreys, "if that was the case; poorer even than many of them are now."

"But yours, last Sunday afternoon, was a beautiful one," she offered.

"It was hardly *meant* for that, though."

"Brother Ned says it ain't such dreadful *hard* work, this writin' sermons and things; though I rather *guess* he don't know but little about it, as he never tried. He says it's a good deal easier than choppin' wood, or holdin' plough, or milkin'. I don't know how 'tis, I'm sure. If I did, I should be pretty apt to tell him of't, if he was any ways wrong. He needs to have his notions corrected a little sometimes—or straightened, as folks say; for he's remarkable stiff set, you may depend on't. I wish you'd only come over."

Just then the deacon opened the door.

"Deacon Burroughs, good afternoon, sir," saluted Miss Buss before any other one could have spoken. "Sorry not to have had your company before. Miss Burroughs wouldn't wait tea for you; but I told her *I'd* just as live wait as not; and Mr. Humphreys" — looking at the color of his eyes again — "said *he* had."

"Certainly," acquiesced the clergyman.

"O, well," said the deacon, "I told my wife expressly not to wait; and I'm glad she didn't. How do your folks all do, Miss Buss? and how's your brother?"

"Well's usual, thank you, Deacon Burroughs. But our

folks are full o' hard work yet ; they never'll get through with that. Brother Ned's a kind of a man, you know, that *makes* work. He don't never know, seems to me, when he's got through. There *air* such folks, Deacon Burroughs."

"I know pretty well that your brother is a very industrious, hard-working man," returned the deacon. "He does *his* part in making comb for the hive."

"Yes, yes," laughed Miss Buss ; "no drone about *him*, I tell you. He's at it early and late ; and he means to make the *little ones* work, too, I rather guess, when they get along fur enough. But brother Ned's had rather poor luck, lately."

"Ah! How's that?"

"O, well, nothing *very* dispiriting ; but then you know he lost a cow, by lightnin', last summer."

Lucy broke out into a decided laugh. Mr. Humphreys, too, found it the hardest work in the world to strangle the broad smile that was making its way over his features. And Mrs. Burroughs looked at Lucy, and asked her, in a forced kind of a way, what it was she was laughing at.

But Miss Buss paid it all no attention, and went on : —

"Then he's had a couple o' calves sicken lately ; and one o' *them's* died. And his pertaters didn't seem to do so well's common, this fall. But he's got a *good* yield o' apples, and as fair, smooth ones as ever you see. *You'll* want to bite into *them*, Mr. Humphreys, when you come over, I *know*."

"Yes," said he, "I'm quite fond of apples — *good* apples."

"And these *air* good, I can promise you. If they *ain't*, why, then, never take my word again on *any* subject."

No one doubted that Mr. Edward Buss raised as good fruit as any other farmer in the whole length and breadth of the town.

"However," said that person's quite garrulous and good-natured sister, "I tell him he's got no right to complain." Here she fastened her eyes on the clergyman again. "What Heaven sends us is all we ought to have. It's all we *need*. If we ain't satisfied with that, we're ungrateful; and that's all there is to be said. I hope *I* ain't one o' the ungrateful kind."

All had now finished their meal save only the deacon, — for whom Lucy had relinquished her place, taking a seat on the same side with their visitor, — who was moderately proceeding with his supper.

"You needn't sit at the table for *me*," said he, looking round on them, as they had gradually pushed back.

"Why, now, Deacon Burrōghs," said Miss Buss, playing with her knife a little, "I'd just as live set here and wait for you as not. Don't hurry yourself."

However, he did hurry himself, and they left the table, seating themselves in different parts of the room.

Mrs. Burrōghs called in the other children, who had, according to old-fashioned family regulations, been kept

back for their elders to get through; and then Lucy was left to wait upon them, while her mother sat down with her knitting to listen to and join in the conversation.

It was kept up, with unabated flow, for quite half an hour longer. If at any moment it betrayed symptoms of lagging, Miss Buss instantly flew to the rescue.

Miss Buss was a kindhearted person, and her kind heart had been mellowing in the suns and frosts of full thirty years. You could not well rouse her resentment, for there was nothing of it. She was full of the milk of human kindness. There were blemishes about her manners, though it would have been more difficult to discover them in her character. Her very worst apparent failing was, this quite common but much too curious habit of the pursuit of knowledge, sometimes, it must be confessed, under the greatest of difficulties. In other words, she was a little too inquisitive; and her questions stuck to one's feelings like so many troublesome burrs to his clothes.

"Well," said she, finally, "I must be going." There was no use in trying to detain her any longer. "I've got a little ride to take yet, you see; and Miss Button's waiting over't the store, I s'pose. If I don't get home pretty soon, the folks'll wonder what's got me. Good night, Miss Burroughs. Good night, deacon. Good night, Mr. Humphreys. Don't forget, now, to come over pretty soon, sir. I shall tell brother Ned all about it; and he'll expect you

certain. He'll be glad enough to see you, and to talk over matters with you. And he'll give you good talk, too, and a plenty of it! Good night!"

And out the door she tripped.

"And if *she* can't give one 'good talk,' and a plenty of it," said Lucy to herself, "then *I'm* mistaken; that's all!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEAD BOY.

MR. HUMPHREYS was sitting in his chamber, one evening, writing busily. All day long, except when he had been out to take his usual exercise, he had been occupied with reading ; there was so much to be read, and so small a beginning had as yet been made. Towards night he seemed to feel the spirit of composition visiting him, as if he must put pen to paper forthwith. And so he sat down to it.

The fire was very pleasant, and threw its yellow blaze into his face, and played along the curtains, and danced merrily with the shadows of the bed curtains on the wall. The scene was a quiet and pleasant one. Brightly glistened the old firedogs, brilliant and brazen, staring into the fire as if they would outgaze the flames. The carpet spread out its agreeable figures in the light, inviting repose, and quieting the thoughts. And the brands snapped ; and the coals gleamed, red, and white, and glowing ; and the blaze kept dancing with the shadows on the ceiling and on

the wall ; and the figures of the carpet grew bright and ruddy by turns, and then faded slowly away into one unrelieved brown ; and still the busy pen of the young clergyman kept travelling over the paper, — scratch, scratch, scratch, — while ever and anon he paused and bit its broad feather end.

Now and then he glanced at the fire, and looked likewise half round the room. A stray feeling of comfort, and delight, and gratitude might have shot swiftly past his severer thoughts and stolen into his soul. Even within the framework of his meditations, there might, for a moment, — brief enough, perhaps, — have risen a sweet picture of a home all his own, a fire blazing like this fire on the hearth, the blaze flickering and flaring just like this blaze, the curtains shutting out the world at the windows, the carpet looking ruddy and cheerful, and one other heart, dear to his own, intertwining all his thoughts with its quick and warm sympathies.

But if so he dreamed even for the briefest moment, he instantly shattered the vision into a thousand fragments ; for he took the feather of his pen from his mouth, and bent over to the prosecution of his labor again.

For nearly an unbroken hour his busy work went on. Sentence followed sentence, and paragraph succeeded paragraph, till the sheets presented a long array of tasking thoughts, and impressive appeals, and earnest admonitions. He ran his quick eyes backward over it all, from time to time, considering, and weighing, and comparing, till he felt

critically satisfied. He paused to reflect, to gather the impetus for his thought again, and to cast his expression in the proper mould; and then on he went once more with his pen, the same steady scratch, scratch, scratch resounding all through the otherwise silent room.

A step was to be heard upon the chamber stairs. He listened a moment. It came straight to his door. And then a knock.

Opening the door, he found Lucy standing there, light in hand. Her face was pale, and her looks betrayed evident emotion. Mr. Humphreys looked at her for an explanation of her excitement.

"Mrs. Murphy has sent up for you, Mr. Humphreys," said she, "and wishes to know if you cannot come down and see her this evening. She has been in great distress for the loss of her boy; and she wants some one to comfort her. They thought she might go crazy with her trouble. It's her only child, you see. Poor woman! I pity her!"

The light trembled in Lucy's hand as she narrated the simple but touching story.

"Yes, I'll go directly," said the clergyman. "But where does she live? I believe I've never seen her, have I?"

"I guess not; but she has been out to meeting pretty constantly, and carried her boy with her always when she went. She's a poor woman, and lives in the little brown house but a short ways on the back road. You turn in just beyond the academy road, and then it's on your right hand. Mrs. Murphy is the name."

“I think I know the house now,” replied he. “I have passed it, I recollect now, in my walks that way. I will go over there at once.”

Lucy withdrew, and the clergyman put aside his papers. His was the duty to visit the sick and comfort the afflicted; yet no more his than the duty of us all. We are but brothers and sisters, and no social differences can break the great family tie asunder. Yet to their pastors do the flock most naturally look for sympathy when earthly sympathies can do little to heal the gaping wounds, for his seems the balm given only of Heaven.

After a quick walk, — for it was a cold evening in December, — the frozen ground meeting his feet like a pavement of stone, he arrived at the little brown house, and stopped a moment to take breath before going in. The bereaved woman was an Englishwoman, who had, by some fate or fortune undiscovered as yet by any one, been tossed on the tempestuous ocean of life, and finally drifted into the safe and quiet little haven of Brookboro'. Here she had supported herself with her own hands, devoting all her care and affection to the welfare of this, her only son. He had just grown old enough and large enough to be serviceable to her; and at this age had died.

He knocked, and was admitted by Mrs. Upton, the blacksmith's wife. As he stepped through the small entry and opened the inner door, his eyes fell upon a sight that moved him deeply. There stood the poor woman, holding up her checked apron with her left hand, while with her

right she was gently smoothing down the hair over the white forehead of her dead boy.

"Poor, dear Jamie!" said she aloud; "I didn't think I should ever see this sight; did *you*, Jamie? It never seemed as if 'twould come to this! O, poor, poor Jamie! Just when you was growin' into your mother's heart so; and you was always such a good boy, and loved me so much, and never made me speak a quick word to you!" She stopped, and carried her apron to her eyes, sobbing bitterly.

And then she fell to caressing his forehead again, passing her hand over it continually.

"O, if *I'd* only been taken first!" said she; "if *I'd* only gone before you! But then you'd have been left behind, darlin', and I couldn't have died happy so. No, no, dear boy, I must follow after; and I *shall* follow soon. There's nothing worth livin' for now! The world's nothin' to me any longer! Poor boy!—if I could only look into your eyes once more, jest a single minute—those blue eyes, so much like your own mother's when she was a girl! If I could only hear you speak again! Won't you speak again, darling? Won't you never move your cold lips again? Let me kiss them once more, Jamie—jest once more, before they take you away from me forever! O, dear, *dear* heart!—how *can* I bear to see you put in the cold ground out of my sight, and all so dark, and still, and dead! nobody to come near you any more! nobody to ask you if you are hungry, or cold, or if you want to see your poor,

dear mother! O! O! *I can't bear it — I can't bear it!*” — and again she broke out in irrepressible groans, that convulsed her entire frame with fearful motions, while she sank down upon her knees by the side of the bed and wept uncontrollably.

The young clergyman stood still with the crowd of his emotions. The last time he had stood by a death bed was when he was at that of his own mother; now he was witnessing the grief of a mother for her dead son.

The body lay extended on a board that was fixed across the bedstead frame, having been laid out by the kind offices of Mr. Upton and his wife, the latter remaining afterwards to try her words of consolation with the heart of the crazed mother. But her words, though well meant and tender, were vain in a time like that. The tempest-torn heart of the sufferer was not to be soothed in a moment, convulsed with such a terrible grief. The waters boiled too violently to be quieted with only the oil of pitying expressions. It needed a greater than the mere strength of human sympathy to hold the waves finally in subjection and calm the raging elements of her soul at will.

A sheet had been thrown over the corpse, which she had turned back from the face and breast, disclosing the outlines of the youthful figure, conjuring up in the imagination fancies too ghostly to be expressed, and breeding in the heart feelings too solemn, and tender, and mournful to find their way to the tongue. The sight of a dead body, enshrouded in the white uniform of the departed, is at all

times deeply impressive ; but especially so at night, in an illy-lighted room, where only death and silence brood, and occasional sobs, half stifled, fall on the ear ; with the corpse stretched helplessly before you, its arms extended by its sides, its lips white and dumb, its eyes sealed in death, its pale forehead so cold and ghastly to the touch. This is all calculated to sink its influence deeply into the heart ; for the heart is our humanity, and death appeals to all alike.

But the sight of the anguish, — the deep distress that knows no alleviation, — the convulsed frame, shattered and tossed with the violence of the soul's emotions, — the exhausting grief, too deep often for tears, gnawing on the heart like a ravenous wolf on its prey, — this is what thrills finer cords than the mere view of death itself ; because it is a trouble that even in our widest sympathies we cannot comprehend, and in our quickest feelings we cannot keep pace with ; and too poignant for us to hope to allay with empty words and pitiful phrases.

While the bereaved widow still knelt by the bedside, continuing to bewail her affliction, her heart smitten as with cruel thorns and bleeding at all its pores, the young clergyman advanced across the floor, and, without saying a word, knelt down beside her, before the lifeless body, and lifted his voice in prayer.

The woman did not look up as she first heard that deep voice ; she might have done so at another time, but not now. But her groans and wails ceased, and she bowed her

head still lower, while her repressed sobs alone were to be heard above the syllables of the clergyman.

O, how grateful was that poor, stricken heart, when first those prayerful words fell on her ear! How like dew or rain on parched ground dropped those fervent and earnest syllables of supplication on her stricken soul! What a gushing out was there of all her hidden and tenderer feelings! and what a glad rising on the wings of a gleaming faith towards the throne! and what a gradual sense of peace, calm and holy, stole gently over her soul, quelling the turbulent tempest, subduing the waves, and soothing all to happiness and resignation!

And this only came of prayer. She entered into the spirit of that prayer as never she had entered into that of any prayer before. Her heart climbed up on the ladder faith had suddenly built; and there, where the heaven opened, she felt that she saw the angel face of her dear boy smiling upon her from beyond the clouds and the mists, far away from the troubles and the temptations, in sunny fields where clouds never trailed their dark shadows more, and where the sunshine laughed eternally.

Blessed are they who see by such faith as this, whether it wrestles for a long time with the soul before it gets final possession, or steals into it as gently and imperceptibly as the light that enters at the eastern windows in the rising morning. Blessed, thrice blessed, are they who can tear away these curtain films from the eyes of their soul, and look beyond the fogs, beyond the clouds, beyond the deep

blue itself, even to the heaven that reaches far backward to eternity.

Mr. Humphreys prayed long and with a Heaven-given unction. His tone was earnest and warm. His words were to the heart of the poor woman like words of fire. He prayed for help in the time when help could come but from a single source. He besought the compassion of Heaven on hearts afflicted like the heart of this poor widow. He begged that oil might be poured into the wounds that had been made, and that the suffering and anguish might result in a higher health and a truer faith. All his human sympathies were melted for the sufferer; and that did but heat his heart the more in its supplications for the sympathy of Heaven. He poured out that humble heart freely, and the strength and courage that came of it were refreshing.

As he rose from his knees he asked the mother if she would not be more calm, and sit down and talk with him. She immediately arose and seated herself; but she kept the apron to her eyes, whose heavy folds showed that it had been saturated with tears.

Mr. Humphreys now began to talk in a calm and thoughtful strain to her, speaking of death as but what was in store for us all, some falling by the wayside early on the journey, and some living to make farther advances towards the goal they had set before them; and told her that we ought not to murmur at God's goodness in removing the tenderer plants to a more congenial soil before contact with this world's impure influences had blighted them; neither

had we a right to call in question his motives in visiting us with afflictions, for he had said that he truly *loved* whom he chastened, and it was with stripes that we were healed.

Then he quoted to her such consolatory passages of Scripture as were spoken for hearts in her condition, applying them with such words as could not but be balm to her wounds, and strength and comfort to her spirits. Her boy was not dead; he was only sleeping. Though he could never come back to her again, yet she should go to him. By faith she would behold this affliction in the light of a blessing. It would enlarge and enrich her heart, the experience of this great sorrow. It would cut loose her affections from the fleeting and dying things of earth, where all was but perishable, and fix them on objects to which, perhaps, just such a grief as this was needed to draw them, where their richness could never fail, nor their strength decay.

He sat and told her over again of the sorrows, and buffetings, and revilings, and griefs through which her Savior freely passed only that such as she might be made whole; and now, when that Savior asked her to give up her boy, her only son, should she hesitate when the sacrifice was only momentary, and promised such great final good to both? Ought she not rather to surrender him up without so much as a murmur? and ought not the language of her heart to be, "Lord, here is that which thou hast given me"?

She grew perceptibly calmer, yet it was a calmness not yet all peace.

Her eyes were still fixed on the upturned face of her dead boy. Ever and anon her breast heaved with a deep convulsion, and a wretched sigh escaped her lips. For some moments this continued; and finally she buried her face in her apron again, and gave way to a flood of tears.

“O poor, dear boy!” she sobbed; “I never thought to see you layin’ on the bed so dead as this. Won’t you never speak to me again, Jamie? Won’t you call me ‘mother’ once more—*jest once more*? What shall I do here all alone, and nobody to love or care for? What shall I work for any longer? O, my heart will break; it *will* break—break—break!” She sobbed this last word forth pitiously indeed.

Mr. Humphreys took the Bible, that lay upon the table, and opened to the Gospel according to St. Matthew, and there he read to her what Jesus had preached to others from the mount,—how that those who mourned were blessed because they would experience the heavenly feeling of being comforted hereafter,—and then he proceeded to apply what he had read as the Savior’s words, making it mean nothing except for those with hearts bruised just like hers, and telling her that he stood ready and listening to hear her cries, and to comfort her with his presence and sympathy.

It was quite midnight when he left the little cottage. But the mother’s face was irradiated with the gleam of a new joy, higher and purer than any she had known before, and her syllables were now of calm resignation, while she

stood and gazed at her boy with a feeling of submission, reaching forward in her hope to the time when they should again be united at the feet of Jesus, where no tribulation, no anguish, no partings, no death should ever dissever their love again.

The clergyman felt that there was that within the little brown cottage which neither wealth, nor friends, nor earthly honors could confer ; it was the spirit of grace and of peace.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEWING SOCIETY OF OUR PARISH.

OF course this met every week — sometimes at one house, and sometimes at another. Each family opened its doors in turn.

To give the reader a faint idea of the manner in which matters were conducted at these meetings, as well as to introduce him or her to sundry other people who went towards filling up the parish numbers, I shall take the liberty to walk into the parlors, or front rooms, of Mr. Israel Bard's house, and look about for myself.

If the reader goes with me, he will see Mrs. Bard very much occupied in getting supper. She seems to have a burdensome sense of there being *company* about. Such a thought not unfrequently troubles some persons much more than it does others. It did trouble Mrs. Bard quite a good deal. Perhaps she could not help the feeling, and that may be said in her favor.

It is now January; a cold, raw afternoon; the earth white with crusted snow, on which the sick sun falls with-

out any warmth; the winds puffing their careless way about in the street; the gardens, and yards, and fields holding out a picture of desolation and gloom. Very few people are passing on the village street; and several horses, with sleighs and horse sleds attached, are standing and drowsing, with buffalo skins over them, beneath the sheds about the two village stores. If, now and then, a person strays out into the cold, he seems to go along as if it pinched him at every joint, and he were hastening to warmth and shelter again.

The two front rooms of Mrs. Israel Bard present a really animated appearance. Most of those present are ladies, whose bright eyes, and laughing countenances, and winged words keep up the pleasantest illusion about the apartments in the world. There sits Mrs. Jennings, the wife of the doctor, the centre of a circle of pleasant faces and joyous hearts. She seems as active as her husband in dispensing health by her looks and conversation. And there is Mrs. Wilkinson, the wife of the preceptor of the academy, whose rustling silk dress does not fail to attract the attention of the younger and sometimes envious ones, and who always can make as many attentive listeners among them as she chooses. And there is Mrs. Upton, the good consort of the honest-faced and open-hearted blacksmith, modest beyond what is agreeable even to her own feelings, but far more capable than many of less modesty and more words than herself.

And Mrs. Thorn, the widow, is there, too, as she is

always there wherever the society determines to hold its weekly meetings. She is rather closely observant than otherwise, and, upon occasion, can give as large a yield of general village information as any one. But just at this time she is playing only the part of a steady listener. Mrs. Sanger, the village lawyer's wife, is there likewise, quite dignified in her way, and venturing but little in the conversation. She does her sewing more by herself than among the others, rather edging off into a corner, where she can be sure of freedom from disturbance. She is appealed to for her judgment in certain small matters occasionally, and she gives it as if she cared but the veriest trifle whether her judgment was followed or not.

Let me not overlook Miss Buss. There she sits, not far from the front windows; and now she wonders if they *never* have more passing on the street, it seems so much as it does at her brother Ned's; and now she raises her voice to tell some droll little anecdote, to as many as choose to listen in either of the rooms, in her own inimitably droll style. Miss Buss has quite a red face, the proper expression and intensity of which color is duly heightened by a broad ribbon of the same hue that is gathered in a huge bow beneath her chin.

And Mrs. Plimton the wife of the other storekeeper, and between whom and Mrs. Bard, I fear, none of the most cordial feelings exist, — she sat near a table, some of the time, quite busy with her needle, and at others studying a pattern she was about working for the profits and emolu-

ments of the society. There are many younger ladies there, too, all of them full of talk and vivacity, and accomplishing but little except at odd spells when the conversation or laughter flags. A rollicking set they are, with the brightest eyes, the reddest cheeks, and the loudest laughs of any in the house.

As yet there are no gentlemen present. That is not the custom in Brookboro'. They are not suffered the privilege of going out to take tea with the other sex, for no other reason, that *I* could ever think of, than because they might bring too hearty appetites along with them; and so perhaps they were excluded as a matter of domestic economy simply. They cannot expect to come until evening, not before the candles are lighted, and the curtains are down, and the legitimate *sports* of the occasion begin.

Tea is prepared; and Mrs. Bard walks into the rooms rather stately for her, and announces, "Tea's ready, ladies;" and there is a notable jumping up and clearing of laps, and a bustling preparation for the event many have been expecting so long, and a smoothing down of the front hair over the temples, and a fixing up more securely the back hair in its fastenings, and whispers, and winks, and nudgings, and, among the girls, giggling and laughter. But by slow degrees they melt away from the parlors, and flow into the dining room.

It is a pleasant picture around the table, and looks inviting enough for any one. Mrs. Bard pours the tea; and Mrs. Burroughs, who is there likewise, with Lucy, — she offers

to assist about matters. The large, white biscuit are such as are never seen except in the country. Mr. Bard keeps bees; and so several large and clear cards of the yellow honeycomb ornament the long table, and entice the bright eyes of the younger folks. And the butter is like gold, in liberal cakes, stamped with a quite liberal-sized heart, and looking even richer than the honey.

At first it is quite still. There is little said by any one except when Mrs. Bard asks each if she will take sugar and cream, and the answer is either, "No, I thank you," or, "If you please." Then some one speaks of the weather, a topic that never will be treated quite to death; and some other one mentions the preaching last Sabbath afternoon; and a third alludes to poor Mrs. Murphy's affliction, and how hardly it goes with her heart; a fourth breaks out in a fourth new place; and suddenly all begin their supper and their talk together.

It is interesting enough for any body. So many tongues busily going; so many faces radiant with such different expressions; so many voices rising, and falling, and mixing, and running together, and winding round and round each other, and finally raising a pleasant din that drowns every thing, and almost every body, in its overflowing wave.

"I must say I *like* the minister—*very much*," offers Miss Buss to a circle she has succeeded, without a great deal of pains, in drawing around her; "he's not a bit too showy. Brother Ned thinks he's just the man for *this* parish, and I'm of brother Ned's opinion. He's so talented, too. Girls, what *air* you all thinkin' of?"

Her last sally is met with a laugh that spreads its circles beyond that of her original hearers.

"What *air* ye laughin' at?" she asks. "Don't you think as *I* do about him?"

No one differs from her in her estimate of his talents, or piety, or usefulness.

"He's a man that's goin' to *wear*," says Miss Buss; "and that's a good deal, you may believe me."

"I don't think his sermons are all equal," offers the widow Thorn. "They're better at one time than they are at another; and I've heard a great many say so."

"Why shouldn't they be?" asks Mrs. Plinton. "There isn't one of us that can do a thing in the same way, and equally well, two or three times in succession. *I* like him, and very much, too; and, as Miss Buss says," — here Miss Buss looked very approvingly on the one about to quote her, — "as Miss Buss says, I think he will *wear* well. That *is* a great deal."

"Can't do the same thing over the second time as you do the first?" asks the widow Thorn, leaning her head far down over the table to get a view of Mrs. Plinton; "what's the reason, I'd like to know? Can't I hem a garment to-morrow just as well as I'm doing it to-day? I don't believe in such notions myself exactly."

"If you think there is no difference between sewing and sermonizing, I hardly imagine you have looked at the subject," returns Mrs. Plinton, quite pleasantly of course. "But *I* have an idea that the kinds of labor are *two*, and each quite distinct from the other."

"Well, *I* don't see it so," says Mrs. Thorn, "and I don't believe I can be made to. Work's work ; there's no denying that, *is* there ?"

"O, no," acquiesces Mrs. Plimton, rather thoughtfully, though not by any means greatly troubled with the widow Thorn's position.

"Well, then," goes on the widow, "if a person can do a piece of work well to-day, he can do it well to-morrow ; and he *ought* to do it rather better, for he's got the benefit of his experience."

"But mental labor is distinct from every other kind of labor. It is not the body that is tasked ; it is a strain on an organization that we know very little about."

"What's the reason we don't ? I don't quite believe all I hear about these matters myself. People talk about working the mind just as if there was the same hard, downright labor in it that there is in working the body. Now, I think, as you say, Mrs. Plimton, that, if one kind of labor *is* the hardest, it's that of the body. Ask your minister which he'd rather do — go out into the woods, with his axe over his shoulder, one of these cold winter days, and buckle down to it all day long from morning till night, and have nothing to eat except the little cold handful he carries in his pocket, or sit in his nice, warm room, with a good carpet to his feet and a pleasant prospect from his window," — she glanced at Mrs. Burroughs, with whom the minister boarded, — "doing nothing but just make his pen go over the paper ? Which is the hardest, now, I'd like to know ?"

There is a gentle buzz of admiration on the part of the others, as if Mrs. Thorn had made a point Mrs. Plimton cannot overthrow. However, the latter is nowise disconcerted. She goes on : —

“No doubt a clergyman *would* be glad to take the exercise you speak of, and diet at as low a pitch as you have prescribed for a hard day laborer ——”

“Yes, yes,” laughs out Mrs. Doctor Jennings, “I think ’twould be for the good of *every* man, that used his brain, to go out and swing an axe in the woods a day now and then. Dr. Jennings says the same, too. Ha, ha !”

“But,” continues Mrs. Plimton, “those who think that the labor of the brain is lighter than bodily labor certainly cannot have given the subject much thought.”

Mrs. Thorn bridles. Several, especially of the younger ladies, look at her to see how she is going to take such a hint as that. But Mrs. Thorn suffers Mrs. Plimton to go on, until she can properly marshal her own forces again, and renew the assault to better advantage.

“For *my* part,” says Mrs. Plimton, “I have an idea that they who never use their minds enough to hurt themselves hardly know what an effort it costs those who are obliged to. It’s a kind of labor such people can’t understand, talk about it as they will.”

“That’s what it is,” adds Mrs. Sanger, the lawyer’s wife, with much emphasis. “People shouldn’t be so hasty in forming their opinions where they are not familiar with their ground.”

"I think myself," still adds Mrs. Burroughs, who might well be supposed to know something about the individual whom they used to illustrate their case, "that Mr. Humphreys is a very hard-working man. Very few work harder."

"No man *can* labor like those who work only their brain," says the lawyer's wife, thinking only of her husband. "I've had abundant opportunities to know that for myself."

Miss Buss grows redder than ever in the face; and she lifts her hand and says "she don't know about it." Brother Ned is quoted again, as usual; and brother Ned says that, if ever a man *works*, it's in a potato field, in the middle of a hot summer day. "If *that* ain't work," says Miss Buss, "I'd like to know what is."

The younger ladies titter, and Miss Buss is made happy; for she has the most amiable feeling in the world about people's laughing, and always gives them credit for enjoying her *matter*, when very often the reason of the mirth lies only in her *manner*.

Mrs. Thorn comes to the rescue. She has rather lost ground for the last few minutes; but she tries to make up for it by putting a trifle more of volume into her voice, and addressing herself to the table rather than to Mrs. Plinton alone.

Miss Buss *will* be heard, whether her view is a new one or not; and she takes *both* sides of the question, hoping rather to give satisfaction to all parties. And she so

sprinkles in her droll humor, and dry anecdote, and sparkling quotation, — generally from “brother Ned,” — that she throws the whole of them finally into the best of humor, making even Mrs. Thorn and Mrs. Plimton look steadily for half a minute at each other, and then laugh in unison. It is a capital scene, worthy of an artist even above simple village pretensions.

In the midst of a pleasant tumult, therefore, the table breaks up, and they flock into the other rooms.

For a time there is nothing at all done. Work is suspended. The girls and girlish ones go sailing about in little squads, hunting up the curiosities in that part of the house, and fumbling amongst the work that has been accomplished through the half of the afternoon, or running out the door to get a handful or so of snow with which to rouge their cheeks, and carrying their frolic with a high hand wherever they are.

Some assist Mrs. Bard in clearing away the table, that she may at least have an opportunity of sitting down with the rest of them by and by; and the dishes rattle loud enough almost to drown the talk and the laughter in the other rooms. They gather about the hearth, where the brass firedogs look so shining and comfortable. They sit at the windows. They walk, two and two, through the rooms. They listen to Miss Buss, and to Mrs. Thorn, and to Mrs. Dr. Jennings, and in turn each one gets listened to herself.

Twilight closes early, shutting out the light from the

windows, and making the wide village street, with its far-apart, straggling houses, look almost deserted. The sight of the cold snow, lying as still as the shroud over the speechless dead, sends not only a shudder over the frame, but a chill to the very heart. It makes those who look out thoughtfully — as every one must do at this hour — feel grateful for the comforts of shelter and home, and the blessings of companionship and neighborhood. There are no thoughts, in summer or in winter, that come so close to the better feelings of the heart as twilight thoughts.

And, finally, one candle comes in, perched on a tall stick that stands in a large, deep tray, with the brightly-polished snuffers close at hand. And then another, and another. And at length both the front rooms are lighted.

Hardly have all seated themselves comfortably again, and hardly has the light work of the evening begun, when a step is heard at the door. It is Mr. Bard himself; and Mr. Humphreys is with him. All make a notable bustle to receive the latter, though there is not the least need of it, and though by nature he is one of the quietest men in the world. He moves around the rooms with ease, nothing stiff or constrained in his manners, addressing every one in turn, and dropping a remark at each collected knot calculated to put all in the best of spirits.

Miss Buss is still Miss Buss. Good soul! she always will be. If she were any thing else, there would be a large social vacancy in Brookboro' which the united ingenuity of all its people would fail to supply. She must give the

minister a welcome a little different from that extended by the others; and so she rises from her chair, and shakes hands with him very cordially indeed, and asks after his health very particularly, and turns very red in the face, redder even than the great bow that trembles so beneath her chin.

At length sleigh bells are to be heard in the street. They are approaching the house. The girls listen, and their faces color. Who can it be? And before that horse is fairly hitched to his post, another circle of deep-toned bells chimes in with the first, and the hearts of the younger ones within beat quick time to their wintry melody.

It is not long before there are plenty of coats among the dresses, quite blocking up the rooms. Every one has a most respectful word for the village minister, who by this time has settled himself in slow and comfortable conversation with Mr. Bard and an honest farmer from just over the hill, and every one gets a most kindly and affectionate greeting in return. Mr. Humphreys skilfully adapts his conversation to the tastes and inclinations of those with whom he is thrown in contact, and makes many friends by so natural a process. He is no farmer; yet he talks of the last year's crops as smoothly as if his own hands had held the hoe and his own arms had swung the scythe. Whatever is of interest to his parish he makes his own interest; and so he grows steadily into the heart of his people.

Now the work progresses but slowly. There are count-

less interruptions. They stop to discuss the plan of using their accumulating funds for furnishing new cushions for the pulpit, and a little improvement in musical instruments for the choir. There is a great variety of opinions on the subject, very many more being put forth than would generally be in bodies larger than that. Some think their moneys had better be allowed to accumulate for two or three winters, and then be employed on what in the mean time may be determined on. Others are for applying all possible profits at once, it is so much more encouraging to see the result of their labors as they go along. The matter, however, is not finally settled now. It is left open through the winter, lest, perhaps, there might be nothing remaining to talk about.

When they begin to bundle up to go, it is a scene of confusion that no pen can describe, and describe it as it is. There is no other scene in the world, whether village world or wide world, just like it. Such bustle; such talk and laughter; such a mixing up of cloaks, and capes, and hoods, and shoes; such parting words; such a variety of final stories; such roguery and mischief; such a buzz, buzz, buzz of voices, — an artist couldn't take it down, and do it faithfully. Only they who have been through the scene themselves can shape their imaginations so as exactly to encompass the whole without the loss of a single part.

CHAPTER IX.

A TALK WITH THE FARMERS.

WINTER had broken its icy heart. The spring rains had thawed out the frosts from their fastnesses, and washed the earth pure from the muddy footprints of winter.

The little study had been kept pretty closely by the young clergyman during the winter just gone, his thoughts now recurring to those long and silent hours of meditation and study with feelings of the deepest pleasure. The labors he had performed at his table, and the hours of solitary communion he had enjoyed with his Maker, that he could now recall in carrying his mind back over the field of his winter experiences, made his heart glad as it never had felt before. He rejoiced in the opportunity that was offered him to be of good service to his fellow-men; his gratitude expanded at feeling that his life might yet become the true and the sincere life that his dying mother had, with her latest words, enjoined him to pursue.

It was a delightful morning in May, about the middle

of the month, when he resolved, as he stepped off the broad doorstone before Deacon Burroughs' door, that he would take a wider range in his walk than he had hitherto done, and hunt up as many of the natural beauties of the village as he could.

First he strolled up the street. The cherry blossoms were thick over his head, where the garden trees leaned over the walls and fences to the street, starrng their branches with innumerable yellow and waxen flowers, among which the droning bees were buzzing without cessation. The lilacs were fragrant with their spike-shaped bunches of blossoms, and their odors sailed and drifted every where, like the rich scents of magnolias in tropical climes. The apple trees were ruddy with blows, and pearly white, and their blossoms contrasted sweetly with the tender green of the shooting leaves. The grass had sprouted all along the walks and under the walls, its slim blades as delicate as the first faint notes of an evening song.

The air, for May, was so bland as to be an enemy to every thought of in-door labor; while, to compare with it well, the sun shone as bright and genial as ever spring sun shone in the world. There were many new signs of life in Brookboro', in the houses, in the yards and gardens, and all along the street. People were out, moving themselves in the air. The spring vacation at the academy was just commenced; and this disbanded many young flocks, who took proper advantage of the opportunity to enjoy to their fill the blandishments of the beautiful morning.

Mr. Humphreys passed through them all, speaking to each one, his own heart light and bounding, his spirits elastic in the extreme, and his feet almost clamorous for the privilege of a good run along the wide walks and over the clean green grass. He felt a new love for life,—a strange and wild love for life,—for only its own sake. The feeling heated his blood, tingling pleasantly in his veins, and warmed his heart till its joy quite overflowed.

Under the cherry blossoms, and beside banks of peach blooms, and past gardens where the women, in their white morning caps, were staking out their flower grounds, and men were busy turning the dark, rich mould with their spades, and boys were making white smokes roll up in clouds from the burning heaps of rubbish over the gardens,—up through the wide village street, seeming wider to him than ever, and more airy, and fuller of sunshine, the great elms drooping their arms protectingly over the road and the walks,—he wended his way, until he reached the parsonage.

This was some little distance beyond the meeting house, and on the other side of the street, in rather the north part of the village. A two-story house it was, plain white, or rather whity-brown, with a pretty little yard before, and a fine reach of garden behind, the latter backed up with an orchard of half an acre or thereabouts, and the whole of the grounds forming as attractive a spot as a deserving country clergyman ever wished to nestle in.

Mr. Humphreys walked round through the yard and

garden, looking closely at every object that attracted his interest. The roof was very sloping in the rear, and so much longer than the section of it in front as to suggest the idea of a man with a low forehead and a long stretch of occiput. The clergyman smiled as the thought came over him.

The old garden was untouched, and weeds would soon be growing there. All around the back door it looked desolate and deserted. It is apt to seem so there as soon as any where about a house, for that is the exact locality where domestic interests gather and consult together in their privacy. It is, in fact, their court; and pots and kettles, and wooden benches and bottomless chairs, and tubs and barrels form their train. He stood and looked at the plum tree, that grew so near the back chamber windows; and at the stone wall, that fixed the limits of the back yard, and told where the garden began; and at the paths that streaked the grass patches; and at the low windows, into which a child could look through their small panes; and his heart involuntarily turned to the days when he might himself be the occupant of some such pleasant parsonage, perhaps of this very one, and his feelings might cluster around a hearth they could claim as all their own.

Climbing the wall, and pursuing his way among the apple trees, from whose boughs the dainty green leaves were just springing, he leaned himself against the scaly trunk of one of the most venerable of them all, and indulged in a brief dream of the spring.

It was such a luxury to be out in that morning air. It fed his spirits with such equanimity of feeling. There was so much balm in the fragrant atmosphere. He drew in such draughts of pleasure with every deep breath. The thought of escape from a long imprisonment could not but occur to him, as it probably occurs to every one who has sentiment enough of any kind to enjoy spring.

Was he selfish? Did he think more highly of his own individual gratification than he ought? While he stood there in the quiet and deserted parsonage garden, and let his eyes run over the whole spot,—vines and weeds, bushes and brambles, house and trees,—was his human heart *too* anxious to find a resting-place from its labors in a retirement like that? He trusted not. He thoroughly sifted his feelings, and hoped they were free from the base alloy of indolence or fear. Yet it was so natural for him, in imagination at least, to behold the fire on the hearth-stone, and to draw the pretty domestic pictures among the coals, and to encircle the whole with happy faces. And as he thus suffered his thoughts gently to lead him, he wondered if this would finally be his field of service, and this pleasant old cot his home.

Breaking away at length from his garden musings, he took his course, through the length of the little orchard, back to the fields and meadows that stretched out broadly in the rear, and determined to climb about for the entire morning among the hills and high pastures.

As he emerged into the open plains, so wide and ex-

tended before his feet, a sense of freedom entered his soul that acted magically on his animal spirits. The blue sky overhead; the warm sun, shining so genially; the grass, sprouting every where beneath his tread; the blossoms on the distant trees, looking like banks of solid flowers, red and white; the winding brooks, that came romping down from the heart of the hills, and went glistening like threads of silver through the meadows; the voices of the few birds that had come back to their old haunts to renew the pleasant associations of the last summer, gone forever, — these sights and sounds filled him with indescribable joy, and he involuntarily repeated aloud, as he walked slowly onward, the beautiful verses of Thomson: —

“I care not, Fortune, what you me deny;
You cannot rob me of free Nature’s grace;
You cannot shut the windows of the sky,
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face;
You cannot bar my constant feet to trace
The woods and lawns, by living streams, at eve:
Let health my nerves and finer fibres brace,
And I their toys to the great children leave.
Of fancy, reason, virtue, nought can me bereave.”

Far across the meadows, beyond boundaries of wall, and fence, and stump, he descried a man ploughing. The thought occurred to him that he would go over to the spot, and take a good snuff of the fresh earth that was being ploughed up.

As he stood still for a moment, and watched the slow-

moving oxen dragging their way along, and marked with his eye the dark trail of dirt that the ploughshare threw up from behind, and tried to count the billowy rows of furrow that had been industriously made by the patient team, he thought there were few sights more picturesque in a spring landscape than that of a farmer at his early ploughing.

It was a smart walk over there; and when he reached the spot, after having climbed a mossy old stone wall, he found that the good farmer was far away at the other end of the field. However, he waited until he had turned his team again, and then jumped from the wall to accost Mr. Johnson.

"I didn't know your land run so far over this way," said Mr. Humphreys.

"Yes," said the farmer, stopping his team in the furrow, and taking off his hat to wipe his forehead with a large yellow cotton handkerchief, — "yes, my land runs 'most *all* ways. There's no telling when I get it all fenced in; and when I do, I find I've been fencing some of it *out*."

"What a beautiful morning we are having!" exclaimed the clergyman. "I declare, I wish almost I was in the way to hold the plough myself."

The farmer shook his head as he put on his hat.

"Ah, Mr. Humphreys," said he, "you can't know much about such work if you think it's light and easy. There's no harder work done, I imagine, than farmers' work."

"Indeed, I do not doubt it, Mr. Johnson. And you must feel sometimes, especially if you get to be a little ambitious

about your farm, that it is a kind of work that's never finished. 'There's always something more to be done.'

"That's it, sir; that's it, exactly," acquiesced Mr. Johnson.

"But *all* labor is hard; we all have our parts to do; and I think he makes his the lightest, and gets through it soonest, who takes hold resolutely and with a deep faith in the great Power who regulates the results. From this view, Mr. Johnson, it is of little moment, after all, what occupation we follow, so it is but honest and serviceable to ourselves and others."

"Just so, Mr. Humphreys. I quite agree with you there."

"What are you going to plant in this field?" asked the clergyman. "Don't stop work because *I* am here. Let me drive your oxen for you a little while, and you follow the furrow. That will help you along rather more than my keeping you standing still; and so much to be done, too. Come; gee, there! haw — haw, there! We can talk as we work, Mr. Johnson. Come along."

And off went the team again, Mr. Humphreys plying the whip with a great deal of needless flourish, and Mr. Johnson holding on by the plough handles with all his old dexterity, and smiling at the thought of such a novelty as he followed after.

"What are you going to plant in *this* field?" asked Mr. Humphreys a second time.

"O, you asked me that before. Excuse me, sir. Corn, sir, corn."

“ Good land is this for corn ? ”

“ None better. Good, strong land, gets all the sun there is, drains early in the spring, and keeps in good order almost of itself. I sometimes think to myself — ha ! ha ! — that — that it will plant, hoe, and harvest itself too ! Ha, ha ! ”

“ What do you raise the most of — corn, or potatoes ? ”

“ Wal, about equally of both. I find as good a market for one as for another.”

“ Keep a very large drove of cows, do you ? ”

“ Wal, yes. We make a good deal o’ butter, and some considerable amount o’ cheese. I raise a good number of calves and sheep, too.”

“ I should be delighted, some day, to look among your flocks and herds with you, Mr. Johnson. I have a great passion for seeing fine cattle ; and cows seem to me almost in the light of companions. We should be poorly off without those good, docile creatures.”

“ Yes, that we should. Really, Mr. Humphreys, I should like to *have* you come over, one of these warm, pleasant days, and go about my farm with me. I think you might find *some* things that would interest you.”

“ No doubt of it ; no doubt of it, Mr. Johnson. I’ll accept your invitation with all my heart. What do you think of root crops for cattle ? ”

“ Wal, I can’t tell. I never raised enough for them to fairly make the experiment. I’ve had a notion of doing so some time or another, and I guess I’ll act on it.”

“ Some persons, you know, have great faith in turnips

for cattle and for sheep, and in carrots, too. I think, if *I* were a farmer, I should try the experiment."

"Yes; but after all," added Mr. Johnson, "these experiments don't amount to much. Sometimes I think they're the wust things in the world for farmers, because they go to make 'em discontented; and a discontented, uneasy farmer is one of the poorest sticks in the world."

This was farmer Johnson's "notion" about progress and improvement among agriculturists. It was a good many years ago; but the notion is not yet quite dug out by the roots.

Mr. Humphreys, by this time, had got himself into a fine glow. His face was flushed with color; his chest heaved with the deep and quick breaths he drew; his hair about his temples was becoming moist; and he felt as if he were physically almost a new creature. Such glorious spring mornings! such rich, fresh-smelling earth! such smoking large cattle! O, what a delight was this brief change to him who had studied away the long winter in the cribbed confines of his little chamber!

"Mr. Humphreys," said the farmer at length, "I rather think this'll do for *you*. I won't overwork you. I s'pose you know the old saying about riding a free horse. Ha! ha!"

"O, no," returned Mr. Humphreys; "but it was my own choice; and when I get tired, I'll tell you. Haw to! haw here!"

And away went the team through the softened ground

again, Mr. Humphreys flourishing the coarse lash more than ever.

“What kind of fruit do you raise, Mr. Johnson?” said he.

“Wal, nothing more than apples, sir; a few peaches, perhaps, and quinces; and sometimes, only now and then, the old pear tree back of the house gives down a basket o’ pears when we shake it; but that don’t amount to much. Apples is about all.”

“Any very choice kinds?”

“O, no; nothing more’n russets, and now and then a greenin’ tree, and as many cider apples as you please. But *I* don’t make much cider myself; only enough for vinegar, perhaps, and to moisten the mince pies with.”

“Then you do not raise much grafted fruit?”

“Very little, sir, indeed. I think, if there was only a market near us for such things, I’d go into the business a little more; but there ain’t nothing of the kind here. Our two stores are all.”

“Yet I have an idea that the nicer kinds of fruit are as good in one’s own family as they are for the market. Don’t you think, Mr. Johnson, that you farmers sometimes make a mistake in keeping the poorest of what you raise for your families, and sending off the best to sell? Isn’t there a little too much of that?”

“Wal, really, I can’t say but there is, sir. But I never happened to think of it in just that way before.”

“Yet it is well worth your while, I can assure you.

What would you think of any other man who should deny himself the enjoyment of the labors of his hands only to exchange the best of what he has for money? Money is good for nothing but to supply our wants. It is worth nothing unless it is properly used. Now, what does money buy, Mr. Johnson, but just such articles as you raise for sale? And if you had only the cash yourself, and not these articles, you wouldn't consent to purchase any but the best for your family, would you? You certainly wouldn't take up with what you say most of the farmers do now, as long as better things were right within your reach."

"Wal, *no*; I should hardly think I should, sir. I hadn't looked at it in just that light before, though."

"There are not many, I find, that do. Farmers imagine themselves rich only as they get money; now, if they raise exactly what money will buy for them, and all they want of it too, and the very best at that, what *can* be the reason of this hankering after bank stock, money at interest, and all that? Enough ought to be saved to provide against the possible coming of want; but more than this is strained after, and too often less than this, is reached in consequence. I think we do not put quite faith enough in the Providence that overrules. We do not stop often enough to think that what *we* plan may not, after all, be what *He* has planned for our good. We are hardly children, Mr. Johnson, in our faith — not trustful enough of our Father."

The talk went on thus for some time. Finally, the ploughing stopped for a while, and the farmer concluded to

rest his smoking team. Mr. Humphreys, not long after, took his departure across the hills and pastures again, wishing Mr. Johnson the pleasantest of "good mornings," and promising, at some convenient day, to come over and visit him at his house.

And Mr. Johnson thought, when he had climbed the wall again, that the new minister was really a man "after his own heart."

CHAPTER X.

AT BROTHER NED'S.

"COME, Miss Lucy," said Mr. Humphreys, one day at dinner, "what do you say to going over to Mr. Edward Buss's house this afternoon? It is a visit I have promised, and I want to fulfil my engagement. Will you go?"

Lucy looked half timidly in the face of her mother, and said she was quite sure she should like to.

"O, yes," said the deacon; "go, by all means, Lucy. The walk will do you good. Or you can take the horse and wagon, Mr. Humphreys."

"Not at all, sir, I thank you. It's the walk that *I* want; and if Miss Lucy's not afraid of growing tired before we get half way there, I should be glad of her company."

"I'll warrant she can outwalk *you*, Mr. Humphreys, to-day," exclaimed Mrs. Burroughs pleasantly. "You don't *know* what she can do yet. She's a great deal smarter than she looks."

Lucy turned very red, and said, in a low voice, "Why, mother!"

The deacon thought there wasn't much use in telling *her* of it, and laughed good naturedly, to make his remark go down with a little better relish.

At all events, after dinner they started. It was a rather warm day in the early part of June. They walked off together up the street until they came to the road that branched off in the direction of Mr. Buss's place, and there changed their course by the difference of a right angle.

It was a pleasant time to walk, although, perhaps, a trifle too warm if one walked too fast. The fields on both sides of the road, both next the walls and beyond the strips of woodland that came up to support them, looked smiling as they lay stretched out beneath the bright sun, their bosoms teeming with the swelling seeds, and warming with the new life that was so soon to burst forth into existence.

Across the belts of woods the striped and red squirrels were running, chirping and chattering as they caught the sound of approaching footsteps, and climbing some lofty tree from which to look down saucily on the unknown enroachers. Gay flies swarmed and danced in the strips of sunshine that fell through the windows of the leaves across the floor of the road, chasing each other in idle and wanton play. The wind, now and then, drew gently through the lattice work of the foliage; and Mr. Humphreys took off his hat to enjoy the refreshing breeze.

After walking slowly onward through patches of shadow and long openings of bright sunshine, and after clambering up one acclivity with a trifling betrayal of fatigue, and

going moderately down another, the hot sun throwing up its dancing and wavering lines of heat from the earth, they at length came in sight of the little red house where Mr. Buss and his family lived, when Lucy very naturally called out, pointing to the spot, —

“There’s the place.”

And in a few minutes now they reached it.

The house was nothing more than would be looked for in the mansion of a farmer in very moderate circumstances, quite small, perched on the edge of a steep slope of land that made the owner quite a hollow in the rear, with an extensive pile of wood on one side of the building, and a more extensive surface of chips stretching in almost every direction from it — the whole, although by no means suggestive of wealth, sufficiently so of the commoner comforts of life, as well as of hard work and persevering industry.

They knocked at the front door, — there was no yard fenced off before the house, — and Miss Buss opened it.

It would be at the risk of provoking honest smiles among my kind readers, were I to take down the exact words Miss Buss employed in her very earnest and hearty welcome of her visitors; and some might think I, half unconsciously, was designing a caricature, when nothing but the real picture would be my aim.

Miss Buss, however, got them both into the sitting room, with a great deal of talk, — her genial and effervescent talk, — and then said, if they’d excuse her, she’d go and help get her sister in readiness to come in and see them.

And she left her visitors, in the mean time, to take care of themselves.

After a long interval, in came the maiden sister again, ushering in her brother's wife. She was quite a short woman, fleshy, and with black eyes. Every thing about her appearance immediately confessed to the labor of her life.

The usual salutations over, they sat down for a few minutes to engage in conversation. Mr. Humphreys spoke of his new relation to the parish, of his deep interest in the welfare of those over whom he was set in spiritual charge, of the general goodness and sincerity of the people, of the pleasantness of the whole town, and, finally, of such individual matters as were of special moment to the family he had come to call on. His own good judgment led him on in the proper way to those topics that would be of most concern to Mrs. Buss and her sister; and before the latter were well aware of it, they found that they had become engrossed in quite a lively conversation.

"You have several children?" inquired the clergyman.

Strangely enough, the mother looked at her sister before answering the inquiry, as if the maiden might best answer for her.

"Only four, sir, that's all," said Miss Buss; "but sometimes I think *that's* four too many, from the noise they make. They're enough to craze me when I don't feel very well, as I sometimes am apt to feel."

"Children may be considered the chief blessings of their

parents," remarked Mr. Humphreys; "at least, *good* children."

"Yes; but I tell sister," said Miss Buss, "that one can't always depend on their being good. Sometimes the very best parents have the very worst children. These things seem to go so strange, now and then."

"Undoubtedly some natures are more perverse than others, and need more close watching and severer correction. Yet I think it will generally be found that, where they come up with dispositions as radically wrong as some of them seem to be occasionally, there is a want of proper watchfulness and care among the parents. It can hardly be otherwise. There is rarely an effect without a cause."

"I believe *I've* got pretty good children, on the whole," offered Mrs. Buss.

"O, yes, every mother thinks favorably of her own, of course, Mr. Humphreys," returned the maiden sister, laughing. "But I'll go out and bring in two or three of 'em *now*. I want 'em to see the minister themselves."

And Miss Buss started to go. Presently she came back into the room, dragging along one, and being dragged along herself in turn by another.

"Come, Peggy," said she to the one who hung back so heavily and hid her face in her aunt's gown; "you must be good for a few minutes. Here's the minister. Stan' up, Peggy."

It took quite a serious tug to bring the little bit of obstinate modesty into the room just as she ought to come.

But it was accomplished at last. The two children were presented to the clergyman, and forthwith fell to exhibiting their newest domestic tricks to the somewhat astonished company and their delighted but half-complaining mother.

As a last resort, Miss Buss, their more energetic aunt, felt compelled to put them out of the room ; which she proceeded to do while the one was laughing quite saucily in her face, and the other was trying to cry by making bubbles at its mouth and drawing down its face to a length that was any thing but natural.

They then continued to pass perhaps half an hour in quiet conversation, save when, now and then, a thumping kick or bang was directed by one or the other of the turned-out juveniles against the door, who seemed in this way to be having their revenge for the liberties of which they had been so summarily deprived.

"What *air* them children at, do you s'pose?" anxiously inquired their mother, directing her look and her question at the maiden sister.

"I'll go see, at any rate," was the reply, as the latter started rather briskly from her seat, and darted out through the door.

Lucy thought she certainly heard a cry as of distress, and bit her lip ; and, in a moment after, she was quite sure she caught the sound of a loud laugh of a child ; and she laughed herself, too, as its merry echoes rang in her ears.

"I guess Nancy'll find trouble enough with 'em," exclaimed their mother ; "for it's more'n *I* can do to make 'em mind."

Nancy, the sister, came back again soon, looking quite tired, very red in the face, and much out of breath.

"I've conquered 'em," said she, between breaths; "and I've sent off Charles Henry to find brother Ned. You'll want to see *him*, Mr. Humphreys."

"Certainly, I should be very glad to. Yet I hardly expect him to leave his work, at so busy a season of the year as this, for half a day. I try to understand all these things just as they ought to be understood."

The wife felt that he rose in her esteem immediately.

"He's not *fur* from home, very," answered she. "I guess he'll soon come; and I'll be gettin' tea, if you'll excuse me. Nancy, *you* can set with Mr. Humphreys and Lucy."

Lucy looked inquiringly over at her escort.

"I hardly think, Mrs. Buss," answered he, "that we *can* stay to tea to-day. Suppose we take another day."

The wife stopped short, and turned round in amazement.

"Not stay to tea!"

"What! goin' home without supper!" exclaimed Miss Buss. "I won't hear a word of it — there!"

Mr. Humphreys averred they did not seriously contemplate staying so long when first coming away. It would bring them late home.

"But we'll have an *early* tea!" returned the wife. "Stay, by all means."

"You sha'n't be delayed any longer'n you want to," added the maiden sister. "We'll hurry about it. And

Ned'll be here in a few minutes, too. He'd be dreadfully disappointed not to see you, Mr. Humphreys, and have a little talk with you. He's so *fond* o' talk."

It was finally settled that the table should be set at once, and supper got. And Mrs. Buss went out into the kitchen part of the house, while Miss Nancy began to draw out the table into the middle of the room where they sat, and to take the crockery and knives and forks from the little closet sunk in the corner of the walls, and lay them on the board.

Mr. Humphreys moved his seat to the window, which was open, and out of which he looked with mixed delight and disquiet. The sight of the grand old woods, back from the road on the opposite side, where the summer breezes seemed to hide themselves in the middle of the hot days, coming down from their leafy chambers by the winding staircases, at the twilight, to play over the heated surface of the ground,—this sight attracted and delighted him. But the ragged-looking road; the tumble-down stone wall, patched up here and there, at a gap, with a broken rail; the chips, strewn here, and there, and every where; the general look of negligence and unthriftiness before the door,—these things marred sadly the feelings with which the beauty of natural objects inspired him; and he could not help thinking how true it was that a man's nature showed itself in the commonest objects over which he had control, and that human tastes were quite as diverse as human hearts.

And while he sat by the window musing, the stillness of the remote country impressing itself deeply upon every thought and fancy, Mr. Edward Buss himself walked in.

“Mr. Humphreys,” said he, without waiting for the ceremony his anxious sister stood at his elbow to perform, “I’m glad to see you at my house.” And he took the clergyman’s hand, which he shook right heartily.

“I hope my visit has not taken you from necessary work,” remarked Mr. Humphreys.

“No, sir; no, sir,” said Mr. Buss, who was just leaving off a short speech to Lucy. “I’d ha’ stopped work, the busiest day I’ve seen yet, to ha’ seen you. It’s a real pleasure to me, sir — a right down pleasure, sir. Wal, sir, how do you think you like Brookboro’? We don’t pretend exactly to call *this* part of the town Brookboro’, you know, I s’pose. Do you think you’d like a life amongst our sort o’ folks? Farmers, you know, pretty much all of us; but we claim to know something about what we want in the way of preachin’. Nancy, won’t you open that t’other door? I’m warm, sir. It ain’t often that I come in and set down with company; we have so little of’t, in the first place, and I have so little time to waste, in the second. And to set down, in a hot day in summer, with a *coat* on, — that’s what I ain’t use to at all.” And upon this he thrust out both his arms at their full length, at right angles from his breast, as if he would, by some process he did not exactly understand himself, get more thoroughly *into* his coat, and adjust it more properly to his person, especially over the shoulders and under the arms.

"Well," said Mr. Humphreys, designing to reply to his question, "I am free to confess I like Brookboro' highly. As for my *settling* with the good people here, probably *they* will have quite as much to say about it as *I* should."

"Exackly," exclaimed Mr. Buss. "But I rather guess most on 'em wouldn't have much to say *against* your stayin'. If our folks *like* a man, they're apt to like pretty hard."

Miss Naney fully acquiesced in that last remark, and likewise coincided with her brother in the opinion that they already liked Mr. Humphreys exceedingly.

The clergyman changed the topic as dexterously as he could.

"Some very pleasant *farms* about the town," said he, "as well as pleasant *people*."

The maiden sister smiled and looked at her brother Ned at the same moment.

"Ha! ha! Yes. What do you think of the looks o' *mine*, sir? Pleasant location for a house, I think; though some folks pretend to say it looks as if a good strong man could push it over the hill down into the holler below us. Yes, I think some of our Brookboro' farms *air* pretty pleasant situations. But a farmer can't stand about the *looks* o' things much. He hasn't got time. He's got other things to attend to. Jest count up his chores, and his work in plantin' time, and mowin' time, and hoein' time, and harvestin', and huskin', and butcherin', and buildin' up fence, and harrerin', and ploughin', and goin' to mill, and a *thousand* things no other man but himself can think on."

Mr. Humphreys admitted that his life was a busy one indeed.

“And then, agin,” added Mr. Buss, brushing up his moist hair stiffly from his forehead, — his sister was always enjoining it on him to keep a good high “forward,” like other people, — “and then, agin, he never must think o’ visitin’ round much; he hain’t got the *time*. Now, you ministers are situated different. That’s your business. You are hired just a-purpose to do that, and nothing else; and I hope, Mr. Humphreys, you’ll make a good share of your calls *this* way. If *I* ain’t at home myself, I know *my folks*’ll be; and they’ll do better for you than I could. I’m but a poor hand at these things, you see.”

The clergyman could hardly repress a smile at the marked candor of Mr. Buss, and was going to say something in reply, when in came Mrs. Buss, escorted, in the front, flank, and rear, by her entire family of children.

“Supper’s all ready now,” said she.

“You’ve seen my children, I s’pose,” said the father to the clergyman.

“Only two of them, sir. Here are two more. I hope you have as good children as you want.”

“Ha! ha! I’m afraid they’re sometimes as bad children as they can be,” said Mr. Buss.

“I guess Mr. Humphreys has seen all he cares to of ’em,” remarked Miss Nancy, looking especially at her sister. But the latter took no notice of the hint whatever.

They sat up at the table — Mr. Buss and his wife, Mr.

Humphreys and Lucy, Miss Buss and two of the children. The other two — the second and third in the order of their ages — were kept waiting till there should be more room, and meanwhile were allowed to divert themselves, and drown the conversation at the table, by rolling and laughing on the floor.

Mr. Buss went on with the rehearsal of farmers' labors, and his own especially, contrasting them with the lightness of other men's occupations, and of clergymen especially. Mr. Humphreys considerably deemed that no good could come of a discussion on such topics, and so did not venture to dispute his premises.

Miss Buss thought that she should like to hear Mr. Humphreys and her brother talk on some point of theological doctrine. "Brother Ned was such a complete arguer, and he'd never give up to nobody."

Mr. Humphreys, however, insisted on men's first trying to live godly lives, and to set pure and bright examples, before throwing away all their natural charities for one another in vain disputes and differences. If the heart was right, and the life testified to it at every point, the reality of religion had already been experienced. And he went on, judiciously and pointedly, to rebuke those who loaded themselves down with the husks of religious theories, while their hearts really hungered for the nourishment that was to be found only in the kernels they threw away.

Possibly it might have been a good thing for Mr. Buss, this invitation of his sister for him to engage in a religious

conflict respecting creeds with the clergyman ; at least, it appeared to be for the time. The manner of Mr. Humphreys was so gentle, there was so little room for one to take offence, his very earnestness and sincerity were so much in keeping with his gentleness and humility, that the sturdy spirit of opposition stood suddenly disarmed of its weapons, and fell to its knees in all the innocence of a childish faith.

Supper had been over some time when they moved to go home ; but they were followed out the door by the earnest wishes of the inmates for their repetition of the visit, and the expression of a hope that, when the minister came again, they should be found "in better trim" to receive him.

The children huddled about Lucy, and stared at Mr. Humphreys. The latter hoped all happiness might be theirs, living in that quiet retirement, and promised to call on them as often as his other duties would permit.

"There's no arguin' with *him*, I see," said Miss Buss, as soon as they had the house to themselves again. "Brother Ned, he ain't *your kind* exackly."

CHAPTER XI.

ORDINATION DAY.

THE summer went slowly and pleasantly by, nothing in all the time occurring to break the harmony of the young clergyman's feelings. The same duties were to be performed over and over again, which, with God's good help, he did not fail to perform faithfully. By steady degrees he found himself working his way into the holiest affections of his people. By his zealous and prayerful words he had excited them to increased progress in the way of the true life. By his pure and consistent example he had, through God's grace, been successful in putting to rout many errors that denunciation alone might have entrenched still more firmly in their fastnesses. By his daily intercourse he had sown seeds of good that would in time spring up, when the season had advanced, and bring forth fruit, some a hundred fold.

Each Sabbath found his devotion to the cause he had espoused still deeper than the previous one, as if, with every succeeding week's labor, the necessity of yet more

arduous and undivided labor made itself apparent. His efforts out of the pulpit were active in the support of his efforts in it. He visited, at all convenient and possible times, around in his parish. He never forgot the sick, or the poor, or the despondent and weary-hearted. He was constant, in season and out of season, to his sacred calling. He made only this the business of his life.

As a natural consequence, the sympathies, at first, and then the affections, and, finally, the deep love of his parish surrounded him all the time. In this brief period he had grown inexpressibly dear to them. They recognized in him the pastor whose zeal was constantly to warm their own, when it might, from worldly causes, show signs of growing cold; whose words, drawn from close and constant study of the Scriptures, were to enlighten them in their path, and fire them with a worthy ardor for Christ, and soothe them under all manner of afflictions, and whose daily walk and conversation were to furnish them examples for their own instruction and imitation.

He had exchanged pulpits several times with the few brethren who ministered in the adjoining towns, and begun an acquaintance with them which he really thought might, if continued, prove eminently profitable both to himself and his charge. There was Mr. Thompson, the clergyman at Northboro', a man a little advanced in life, with a wide experience of men and things that might be serviceable to himself. He had a large family of children, which he kept together by the strictest economy and the farthest foresight

possible. He carried on a bit of a farm likewise, which helped not a little in making the ends meet, as the years went round.

And Mr. Burr preached in Upton, a pleasant village to the westward, that promised some day to become a greater. And in another direction was the town of Grassville, where Mr. Hawley had charge of the flock. Mrs. Hawley was a young woman, who, to make the acquaintance still more pleasant, had formerly been to school at the academy in Thornton, where she formed attachments for some of Mr. Humphreys' dearest friends. He liked especially to go over to Grassville, and talk about his old acquaintance in Thornton, where he had himself been the preceptor of the academy, and studied for the ministry, too. And there were some few little matters, of a strictly confidential nature, that he imparted to Mrs. Hawley, inasmuch as she was a dear friend of years' standing to one of the parties, and could more exactly sympathize with his feelings than any one else. To the eastward, ten miles away nearly, the rough and rocky town of Redcliff clambered and stumbled about over the hills — a much-scattered settlement, yielding but a slim congregation of weekly worshippers, and a poor support for a clergyman, unless he was content to dig it up among the rocks and stones with the rest of them. This parish Mr. Williams had, one of the humblest and most devoted of Christians himself, who never murmured even when his lot was hardest, and saw through the darkness of all earthly trials only pledges of greater joys that

were ready in the world to come. His pious zeal was contagious ; and having wrought faithfully in his Master's vineyard for so many years, going on from victory to victory each succeeding year, he was calculated to inspire so young a laborer as Mr. Humphreys with a deeper and more steadfast love for souls, and excite him, by the warmth and constancy of his example, to increased effort in the race he had set before him. The society of Mr. Williams was worth very much to the young clergyman ; and their interviews, brief as they often were, still left a lasting influence on the labors of the latter in his little parish.

Thus situated and thus surrounded, Mr. Humphreys felt as if he had in reality put his hand to the plough. Every day the work he had to do became more apparent. His labors shaped themselves before his eyes, and mapped themselves out visibly before his mind. Often his spirit was depressed with the fear, that beset him unawares, of not being competent to the great task he had chosen ; but when, at such moments, he went on his knees to Heaven in prayer, he never failed to see his way clearer, and to feel his heart strengthened to persist in its pursuit.

With many varieties of experience, and among his own parishioners and his fellow-laborers in the adjoining towns, he had found that the summer had been spent. The first bright and golden autumn days were come, with their shows of rich fruits and their promise of yellow leaves. The church had been deliberating with themselves for some time, and at length the result of their conferences was made known.

The church committee extended him an invitation to settle over them as their pastor.

Here was cause for serious consideration.

Some of them — so it transpired, finally — were a little fearful of losing so good a man as Mr. Humphreys unless they engaged him before the expiration of his year; and, accordingly, it was determined to give him “a call” forthwith, before he might think of looking round for another parish.

Long and prayerfully did he think the subject over with himself. He sifted all his feelings; he examined closely every thought of his heart; he tried every desire of his soul, intent on knowing if he could conscientiously labor always with this people. The labor was to be lifelong; for so pastors were settled in those days. The responsibility he was to assume was great for a young heart, even if never so full of hope, to think of. It was a matter that had to do not with his own welfare alone; it was related intimately to the eternal interests of those who were to be confided to his watchfulness and care.

Many hours at a time were passed by the young clergyman, in his study, in weighing and considering the subject. He carried all to his Maker, and took counsel only of him. If it was his will for him to abide here, and here work out his destiny, then it would in some way be made known to him. He would seek the answer to his inquiries by continued watching, reflection, and prayer.

And the answer was finally given him. He felt himself

called to labor with this particular people, believing that here was the true field of his service. Ambition might have whispered to him of wider fame than he could ever hope to enjoy in a seclusion like this; and selfishness might have held up before his mind unfavorable comparisons between his quiet life here and the more noticeable lives of some of his early friends; and worldliness have struggled to choke out his high and pure resolution with its worthless weeds; but he steadily beat them all back, relying on God for his strength to overcome temptation, and looking to him for his final approval and reward.

The committee thought it better to proceed with the ordination at as early a day as possible, not waiting for the year to expire. At this season, when the harvest was nearly in, and the roads were in good condition, and the atmosphere was dry and clear, it would be most convenient for the whole flock to be assembled to witness the ceremony; and people from other towns would gather with them in considerable numbers.

So it was arranged that Mr. Humphreys should be ordained at an early period. The day fixed for the ceremony was as pleasant a day as ever dawned in the golden autumn. Early in the morning the village began to exhibit unwonted signs of life. For days before the farmers from all around had been bringing in of such stores for the village people as they had to sell, against the event that would make so large demands on their supplies. Meats and vegetables were distributed in profusion at every house along the street.

At eleven o'clock in the forenoon the exercises at the meeting house were to begin. The sheds were all filled with horses and wagons; the galleries were filled with people; the choir was ample and in perfect preparation for the worshipful assistance they were to give; and crowds loitered around the door. Nearly all the houses were emptied of their inhabitants, who had come out to participate in the ceremonies of the time.

Quite a knot of clergymen had assembled from the towns and villages round about, some the guests of one family, and some of another. The two deacons had their share; and Mr. Bard, and Mr. Wilkinson, and Dr. Jennings performed their part likewise. This was a day that was made more of formerly than now, especially in country parishes, where the welfare of the church seemed but the welfare of the people, as it in reality is. Hence the cause of so general an interest among those who dwelt even miles away from Brookboro'. The clergymen, likewise, were additionally interested, inasmuch as a new brother was, that day, to be permanently added to their scattered and far-apart band. They were receiving into their midst one who was to be a companion and fellow-worker for life.

The meeting house, therefore, was crowded. The exercises opened with prayer by one of the brethren from a distance. It was a solemn and impressive supplication, beseeching the blessing of Heaven on the work which was that day to be accomplished. All joined in it from their hearts.

The reading of the Scriptures was by another, who selected the most appropriate passages for the occasion that enjoined truth, and humility, and charity, and faith on both pastor and people, in order that both might work together for the advancement of God's kingdom and the glory on earth of his name.

The sermon itself was a deeply impressive production. It rehearsed the chief points that constituted the close relationship about to be entered upon by both parties ; gathered up all the separate and diverse interests of each, and sought to fuse them into one common mass that belonged only to Heaven ; portrayed the feelings with which the efforts of a faithful servant of God should be received by the people over whom he was called, and the quick sympathy that should accompany him in every one of his labors ; and drew, finally, a picture of the happiness of a devoted pastor who had surrendered his trust again to his Father, and beheld himself, in the last great day, surrounded by the flock over which he had been placed as an earthly shepherd.

The address to the young pastor himself was such as affected him openly to tears. If ever man tried to realize the full and complete sense of the responsibility he was taking on his soul, he certainly had. And it was the almost perfect realization of this responsibility that made him tremble, and almost falter, at the very threshold of his undertaking.

He was publicly advised of the path he had chosen, and

of its many perils and dangers. Unless he felt his conscience soberly approving the step he was taking, he should pause ere he went on another moment. Unless he could say, from the depths of his heart, that he felt called of Heaven to the labor he was about promising to perform, he should hesitate, and consider the matter thoroughly over again, with serious reflection and after continued prayer.

He was warned of the temptations that would beset him ; for they lurked at every point on the road to heaven. Humanity was weak ; indifference might, at times, creep over his spiritual nature ; lukewarmness might set about his heart, like a sluggish and deadening wave ; his example might lose some of its early brightness, and his shining light grow dull and dead ; a thousand worldly influences were ready to hedge about his soul, to rob it of some of its noble purposes, to cripple its high resolves, to weaken, and undermine, and finally to destroy its purest and most effective plans. For the overthrow of all these silent and secret enemies, strength could be had only of God. Of him he must seek it, and seek it daily, with a heart that put its whole reliance on the measure of his goodness and bounty. A solemn charge was delivered to him respecting the care of the flock which was at this time to be intrusted to his hands. He was solemnly told of his duty to that flock. He was warned against dissensions, and the fostering of uneasiness that invariably led to them. The faith he was required to keep, and to preach, even as it was given him in Christ Jesus. To God, the Father and Judge of

us all, he and his flock were finally committed, to whom they were accountable for what was done here in the body, and in whose lives were to be expected examples of the living and true faith.

The laying on of hands, especially, produced a visible effect on the crowded assembly. They remained almost breathless during this impressive ceremony. It seemed to bring the *reality* of the Christian warfare more directly before them. They could in a greater measure feel what the sacredness of the Christian ministry was. And there, in that crowded little country meeting house, many a simple heart was that day, for the first time, touched with love to God, and with that ceremony dated its beginning in the life of faith, and purity, and godliness.

An appropriate hymn was sung by the choir, after which the doxology was joined in by the entire congregation. O, how strangely beautiful sounded the notes of that dear old hymn, and the echoes of those village voices, as they gathered and spread over the silent street! What a holy spot, even then, seemed that quiet little town! as if the selfish world were all shut out,—its cares, its griefs, its ambition, its deceit,—and only Heaven and the Spirit of Heaven hung gently over the whole place. How many simple hearts felt the immediate presence in their midst of a Power that wings itself wherever faithful worshippers are gathered together!

Mr. Humphreys pronounced the benediction, the assembly rising to receive it; and then the public exercises were closed.

It was a day to be remembered, no less in the calendar of the clergyman's life than in that of the lives of the people — a great day for the church there, and for the entire parish by which the circle of its influence was limited.

Mr. Humphreys retired, first of all, to his study, and threw himself on his knees in prayer.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

THE autumn was waning slowly, its greatest glories beginning to fade out. The mornings were frosty and the evenings chill; and only in the pleasant noons, when the hills were begirt with hazy smokes, like colored transparencies, did the sun feel genial at all.

Mr. Humphreys was seriously thinking of undertaking the next important step of his life.

He took Deacon Burroughs into his room one afternoon, and there proceeded to disclose to him what he had in contemplation. He was about to get married!

The deacon opened his eyes quite widely, as one who had never before thought of such a thing naturally would.

"I only want to know if you can continue to accommodate me, with my wife," said Mr. Humphreys, "through the winter. If perfectly convenient to your family, of course I should by all means prefer to stay here. In the spring, I suppose, I shall go into the parsonage, and begin housekeeping in good earnest."

Deacon Burroughs, for himself, would be *very* glad to have Mrs. Humphreys board with his family; and he would forthwith proceed to lay the subject before his wife. But wasn't this a rather sudden affair?

"O, no, by no means," said Mr. Humphreys.

"But *I* hadn't heard any thing of it before."

"Nor any one else, I presume. In fact, it is, up to this very hour, my own secret. I have committed it to but one other friend, Mr. Hawley, of Grassville, whose wife was an old and close friend of the future Mrs. Humphreys, and who is himself going to supply my pulpit in my necessary absence. O, no, deacon; it's not a *sudden* matter. I have had it in my mind for nearly two years."

The deacon answered by a low "Hum," sinking his chin deeper in his cravat, and musing on it.

"Suppose you do not say any thing of it to your wife until night," said Mr. Humphreys; "and, even then, it will be a gratification to me if the matter is not talked of at all until my return with the real Mrs. Humphreys."

"O, yes," assented the deacon; "*I'll* say nothing about it; and I'm sure *my wife* won't, if I just tell her it's your wish."

"It is. I hope she won't."

"Never fear, Mr. Humphreys; never fear. I think we can do for you all you desire. Mrs. Humphreys shall be made just as comfortable as possible when she *gets* here, no matter *where* she boards. Yes, I'll see my wife about it all to-night. She *can't* have any other mind than *I* have

about it. We should hate to have you leave us; and I know we should like to try and make Mrs. Humphreys comfortable. But in getting ready a little for you, I suppose my wife will be obliged to tell Lucy something about what's going to happen."

"O, certainly. I have no special reason of importance for wishing to keep the matter a secret; I simply think it will be as well. Such things are generally talked about a good deal, you know, deacon; and I think it will be time enough to begin the discussion when I get back. That is all."

"And that's reason enough, Mr. Humphreys. I am exactly of your mind in this matter. But who is the Mrs. Humphreys that is to be? May I be so bold as to ask her name?"

"I will tell you gladly, deacon. She is at present Miss Caroline Edmonds, the daughter of Mr. Edmonds of Thornton. I taught the academy there a long time, and studied there at the same time."

"Ah!" answered Deacon Burroughs.

"I intend going there next week, and shall be absent in all about a fortnight. Then I hope you and your wife can accommodate us here."

"And I haven't any doubt that we can. I will talk to Mrs. Burroughs about it this very evening."

The next morning, when Mr. Humphreys came down to breakfast, he met the deacon and his wife with the usual salutations — his own spirits, perhaps, a little raised by the

near prospect of the coming event. He observed, after a while, however, that Mrs. Burroughs had considerably less to say to him than common, and even drew back into a manner bordering on reserve. She sat a silent listener to the conversation between him and her husband. He thought but little or nothing of it at first, but it presently forced itself painfully on his attention. Something had gone wrong. What could it be? Could it have any connection with himself?

The matter seemed rather to grow worse than better in the course of a day or two; and he could not help observing that Lucy appeared quite as strangely as her mother. Still he was at a total loss to account for it all. They committed no overt act by which he might be made to understand that he was the object of their displeasure; yet he could not but see that their displeasure was certainly excited, and excited for what he could not tell.

They arranged, however, promptly to receive the minister's wife to board, promising them an additional room and all the comforts at their command. Mrs. Burroughs averred that she really had a great curiosity to see Mr. Humphreys' wife. She wished so much to see what his taste could be.

Mr. Humphreys laughed, and said he thought she would approve of it thoroughly. And the deacon himself had no doubt that *he* should. But Miss Lucy, — she seemed to think nothing at all about it; or perhaps she thought differently about it from what she should.

The very next Monday, therefore, the clergyman started off for Thornton. No one knew, save Deacon Burroughs' family, for what purpose he absented himself, though all supposed it was business of some urgent nature. It was understood that Mr. Hawley would supply his pulpit for one or two Sabbaths, as the case might be.

And now we will skip over these two intervening weeks with a good, hearty jump. Undoubtedly a wedding is a very important affair, considered in whatever light you will. It is far too much so for me, just now, to attempt its proper portrayal. The sympathetic reader—he or she who has witnessed these events and reflected upon them carefully—will need no assistance I can render in filling up the outlines of such a picture with such colorings as are best suited to its true character.

I will next introduce my reader to the newly-married pair returning to Brookboro'. It happens to be one of the loveliest afternoons in the latter part of autumn—the sun shining warm and clear, the atmosphere perfectly transparent, a light veil of haze draping the base of the distant hills, the leaves fallen and falling, and every object breathing the air of the sweet and pleasant sadness that attends this peculiar season.

They had come to Grassville by public conveyance. There they stopped to see Mrs. Hawley, the bride's old friend and schoolmate. The meeting between them was joyous indeed. They congratulated themselves on being finally situated so near each other, and hoped they might

long coöperate with their husbands and together to fulfil the whole of the work set before them.

Mr. Hawley still remained at Brookboro', occupying Mr. Humphreys' study. He has left his horse and buggy at home for the latter, who is to drive over from Grassville to Brookboro' with his wife in that. Thus he thinks the bride will both have a much pleasanter ride than by stage coach, and obtain a better view of the country around her new home.

It is about three o'clock in the afternoon when the horse's head is turned to the sight of the quiet little village. The first view of it was got from near the summit of one of the long hills to the southward; and a delightful view it was, too.

There lay the little town, folded quietly in the bosom of the hills. The street that formed the backbone, so to call it, of the town was distinctly perceptible, the old straggling elms raising their towering crests above the white and brown houses, the road looking at that distance like a mere footpath beaten white, and far away to the north disappearing finally in its windings over the hills again.

A small stream, hardly larger than a good-sized brook, bounded the village on the east, that swept silently down through the meadows that skirted the hill, and finally gathered volume and force a mile below, and leaped agilely over the rocks and stones that strove hard to keep back its course. From this little stream the town, or rather the village, had taken its name. A row of willows fringed the

banks of the brook, just now denuded of their leaves, but in the summer season beautifully draped with their graceful coverings. A bridge could be discerned spanning the stream at near the upper end of the village, over which the people who lived beyond the hill were obliged to enter the town.

In that genial autumn day, in the midst of such charming scenery, rocks, hills, haze, and waters on all sides, the novelty of the view operating especially on the feelings of one of the party, it is no wonder that this first ride into Brookboro' was ever after treasured away in the memory of the young bride with peculiar satisfaction, to be recurred to with repeated and increased delight.

She was of rather slight figure, of medium height, — my readers may be curious to obtain all the details, — with dark eyes and hair, a pleasant and highly intelligent countenance, and manners full of the most childish simplicity. She was continually calling her husband's attention to the changing beauties of the landscape, exclaiming quite freely in her unmingled pleasure.

A brown habit she wore, that fitted her form very snugly, and gave her a remarkably *petite* appearance. About her neck was fastened, by a modest pin before, a narrow collar of plain linen, that looked very white and tasteful under her fair chin and clear cheeks. Her hat was a hackney straw, with the simplest trimmings possible, and worn with all the ease that hat could be worn by any one. She kept drumming her foot continually on the carriage

bottom, and exclaiming at the charming views that opened to her. As she came in sight of the village itself, her husband merely remarked, as he pointed off with his whip in its direction, —

“There — that is Brookboro’.”

For a moment she did not speak. Her quick eyes were measuring the whole of the picture. At length she exclaimed, —

“How pleasant! how delightful! I *know* I shall love to live here.”

“If I had not thought so,” said he, “I’m sure I never should have consented to settle here myself. One can be of no service in the cause of Christ unless his heart is in the whole work; and how could I help having my feelings distracted somewhat if I were knowing that you were unhappy? I could not, and so I should fail of the mark I have set before me. No, Carrie; I was fully persuaded that you would love this people when you knew them. Here we will pitch our tent, till called upon to strike it for the long journey. Here we will labor and strive together to win souls to Christ, and to build up his everlasting kingdom. In this field our work shall lie: let us pray God it may be done faithfully.”

He pressed her hand affectionately while speaking; and when he turned to look in her face, he found her eyes swimming with tears.

A moment more he continued, while he suffered his horse to walk slowly on: —

"If we ever feel discontented with our lot here, Carrie, we must try and remember that it is God who has placed us in it. We are but laborers in his vineyard; and we have it not in our power to choose the part that may be easiest for us. Whatever our hands find to do, no matter where the spot in which we are thrown, that we must do with all our might. It is not for us to say, 'I will labor here,' or, 'I will labor there;' but we are to take hold wherever the work may offer itself. If we feel this as we should, Carrie, we may be as happy here as any where; for we shall be happy in the performance of our labor itself. That will be its own exceeding great reward. Let us hope that we may not come short in a single point."

She earnestly joined in the hope.

"The good people of Brookboro'," he went on, "are just like people every where else. Their hearts are only human hearts, and quite liable to error, as we are ourselves. They are exceedingly simple in their manners and sincere in their attachments; at least so I have found them, in the course of about a year's close acquaintance. Their occupation is chiefly that of agriculture; and their wealth consists chiefly of lands, and stock, and crops, and houses. In the matter of living, I find them given to generous supplies; so that I think there need be no fear of starvation among them. They make good neighbors and the closest of friends. Now, if we go among them, Carrie, resolved to see only the *best side* of their characters, I think there will be little cause or room for discontent. If little

troubles arise, as they will every where, let us try and forget them as soon as we can. Such things grow greater by brooding over them. We will look only at the bright side."

And he chirruped gayly to his horse, and rode on faster.

They came to where the road turned from the tavern into the village street. The innkeeper stood on his piazza, waiting, perhaps, for the arrival of the stage. He made a low bow at Mr. Humphreys, as he passed, and then fell to staring hard at his companion, and finally hurried off into the house to tell "his folks" that "he'd be willin' to bet any thing the minister had got his wife with him." And they ran to the windows to see the back of the carriage as it rolled off up the street.

At length they drew up before the gate at Deacon Burroughs's house. Carrie's heart went bumping rather excitedly as she alighted, and she could not repress the petty fears that half haunted her. The clergyman fastened the horse, and escorted her up the path through the yard to the door. There they were met by the deacon, who cordially greeted the bride, welcoming her to his house and to Brookboro'.

Conducting them into the sitting room, where his family were, he introduced Mrs. Humphreys to his wife and Lucy, and told them he hoped they would do all in their power to make her enjoy herself while under his roof, and added that he hoped she would content herself with the best they could furnish her. They mutually explained their feelings

in the matter, and Mr. Hawley came in right in the midst of it. The greeting he extended the bride, and the congratulations he offered his brother, were hearty indeed. He was glad that he was assured of such valuable friends, neighbors, and coworkers, and promised himself a great deal of future happiness in their society and sympathies.

They sat down to tea, and a merry tea drinking it was. All were happy. Mrs. Burroughs, if she had been inexplicable in her manner before, was entirely free from the folds of the mystery now. And Lucy paid especial attention to the bride, engaging her in agreeable conversation respecting her journey just completed. The other two children came in, increasing the family party. The deacon said the sight of a well-filled board did his heart as much good as it did his eyes. And Mrs. Humphreys liked him all the more for the remark.

But somehow the secret of his marriage had leaked out in the village before Mr. Humphreys' arrival with his wife, and was made in some circles the topic of free discussion.

How was it, Mrs. Burroughs? How was it, Lucy?

CHAPTER XIII.

PARISH OPINIONS.

THERE was a good deal of talk, all over the parish, about the minister's wife, as might naturally be expected.

Mrs. Burroughs happened over at Mrs. Bard's, and the latter was very communicative indeed.

"Is she *very* young?" asked Mrs. Bard. "Folks say she's a mere girl. If *that's* the case, I don't believe she's going to make the proper person to be at the head of *this* parish. She might do in some other places; but she won't do *here*."

"O, well!" answered Mrs. Burroughs, affecting to smooth away all such trivial objections; "that's nothing. Yes, she *is* young. My own Lucy would have made quite as good a wife for a minister as she, and *I* don't know but a better one. But then, perhaps she'll get along after a while. We shall have to learn her some things first, though."

"I hope she is modest enough not to think she's going to take the lead here in every thing right off. That's more than some of the older ones I could mention will be willing

to put up with. I'm glad, however, Mr. Humphreys is married, for I think a minister can't be really useful unless he *is*; and I hope he'll find he's got just such a wife as he wants."

"And so do I," added Mrs. Burroughs; "but I don't see exactly how he can really think he has. I have my doubts. She's nothing but a girl, sure enough; and it takes some girls a great while to learn. But perhaps she will learn fast. I wouldn't have you *say* any thing of what I think about it for all the world, Mrs. Bard. 'Twould only make mischief, you know."

"Certainly not. I trust I am not of the gossiping school. Yet I suppose every one has a right to pass judgment on the minister's wife. She marries for the sake simply of laboring with her husband; and as *his* character is free to the remarks of the parish, so is hers."

"That's true enough, Mrs. Bard. It's just so."

After Mrs. Burroughs had gone, Mrs. Bard found it necessary to go over and make a brief, a very brief, call on Mrs. Sanger, the lawyer's wife; and Mrs. Sanger was that night all the wiser by the amount of the remarks Mrs. Burroughs had *confidentially* dropped in Mrs. Bard's ear.

In the course of a few days there had taken place in Brookboro' more little social gatherings than the village had known for months together before. All the ladies were extremely busy. There was something to talk about. Instead of calling directly on the stranger, as they really

should have done, they had an idea that getting together and talking about her would answer every purpose as well. So they got together and talked.

Presently, however, the sewing society met — this time at Mrs. Wilkinson's.

Of course it was expected that the minister's wife should attend; and it was equally expected that she should assume the dictatorship, standing ready to cut, and prepare, and distribute the work, and to direct even those older and much more experienced than herself as to the manner in which the affairs should be managed.

When she first made her appearance in the afternoon with Mrs. Burroughs, — timid and destitute of self-possession as she was, — there was a stir made through the room to receive her, and then all suddenly relapsed into silence. The young bride was sensibly embarrassed.

She looked about her this way and that; but few were the countenances that seemed to offer to her the hearty and ready sympathy of their owners. Instead of appearing rejoiced to receive her, they rather gave her the impression of being all ready to begin their criticisms. But there was *one* face whose goodness and geniality of look attracted her at once: it was that of Mrs. Upton, the wife of the village blacksmith. Mrs. Humphreys felt as if she could rush up to her and embrace her, so entirely different did she appear from the rest.

Mrs. Burroughs, however, with the assistance of Mrs. Wilkinson, who had already called on the bride, went

round and made her acquainted with the entire company; yet when Carrie came to Mrs. Upton, she could hardly restrain the feeling that she was thoroughly acquainted with her already. In a little while they divided and subdivided into knots and little coteries, at almost every one of which something was now and then dropped about the looks, or the youth, or the dress, or the speech, or the something else of the minister's wife. Public property she did seem, sure enough. None thought it was an act of downright rudeness to talk covertly and in whispers of her while she was herself present. Simple souls! they did not stop to *think* of such a thing. Our parish had not got then to be what it has become since, or such practices never would have been tolerated, if only as palpable contradictions of its pretensions.

The conversation was varied, and carried on at varied points. The object of it all quietly picked up some work, and went to sewing with the rest of them. Could it have been possible that she failed to understand what they mostly talked upon? And if not, was that young heart made any the gladder — here in the midst of strangers — in knowing that she was received with such distance and reserve, bordering, in fact, on downright suspicion?

"She *dresses* plain enough," whispered a young girl to the widow Thorn, glancing at her person, so modestly attired.

Mrs. Thorn, of course, turned her head, and fixed her eyes fast on the victim.

"She can't be any older than you," returned Mrs. Thorn.

"Phew! I guess she is," said the other, rather indignant.

The widow laughed, and bent over to her work again.

"Do *you* think she's so very good looking?" asked one of Mrs. Thorn's daughters of a girl who sat near her. "I'm sure *I* don't understand what good looks are, if *she's* handsome."

"No, I don't," was the rejoinder. "I never knew who it was that started *that* story. It's an unfortunate one for her, whoever did."

Another joined them.

"I guess Lucy Burroughs don't like her any too much," said the first.

"And every body thought, *of course*, Lucy would be Mrs. Humphreys before any one else was," chimed in the second. "I shouldn't think she *would* like her. *I* shouldn't."

This was followed by a titter.

"But I don't see what so very *attractive* there is about her for a man like Mr. Humphreys. I thought he would look *higher* than that, as intelligent and handsome as *he* is."

And yet they agreed that he ought to have taken Lucy Burroughs, and only because so the general notion of the parish had directed the matter!

All the girls immediately threw their eyes over in the direction of Mrs. Humphreys.

"She must find Mrs. Upton's society very interesting. I wonder if her father is a blacksmith."

"Fie! fie!" exclaimed another. "What a bold thing you are!" And both fell a-laughing.

"I suppose she thinks that, because she's married, she must mix only with married folks," remarked another. "Ha! ha!"

"At any rate, I wouldn't give up my young *feelings*, if I *was* married."

"Or even if I was a minister's wife."

"No, indeed. I'd be only so much the more independent. People should know that I'd do just as I'd always done."

"But perhaps old company is all she's had. If so, it's very natural she should keep to it now."

They all acquiesced in that idea.

From what her quick eyes and her quicker perceptions taught her, Carrie felt very certain that she was the chief object of the conversation of the girls who had grouped themselves in the corner. She was resolute, although just now she had felt so timid. With natures like hers, it was only a step over the line from timidity to the exhibition of the highest degree of courage.

She immediately took her work, therefore, and went straight into the midst of the young circle, and began to interest herself in conversation with them.

Had a bombshell fallen among them, it could hardly have produced a greater commotion. They hurriedly

moved back their chairs to make room for her, and drew down their faces, and looked as sober as they could. And now and then one exchanged a sly glance with another, which might have meant every thing, but which neither understood.

"I hope I shall not interfere with your good humor here," said the young wife. "I really envied you, you all seemed in such spirits. I came over to have a good laugh with you."

Their faces colored extremely; and she would persist in looking straight into every one of them, as if perfectly innocent of all knowledge of the cause of their blushes. It was excellent chastisement for them, for it was self-imposed and bred of shame.

She began at once to engage them in conversation, speaking first of the pleasantness of Brookboro', and of the natural picturesqueness of its street, and the agreeable character, so far as she knew, of the people. This they received as another rebuke.

From one thing to another she dexterously passed, bent only on exciting their interest in whatever she brought up. It was not her intention, by any means, to do all the talking herself, consenting to their being mere listeners; but she put questions, now to one and now to another, purposely to draw all into the circle of the conversation. And before they once thought of such a thing, they were really deeply engaged. This was a triumph for the young stranger. Yet she had no vindictiveness in it all; she only

wished to remove prejudices, and supplant them with the right impressions to be derived from acquaintance.

They could see, in a moment, — for they were not blind, — how superior were her manners and intelligence to their own, and did not fail to fit their qualifications into the exact places where they of propriety belonged. Still she was unwilling to place any one under the least constraint in her presence, but strove to make them feel only at their ease and properly companionable.

“I should think our minister’s wife was rather fonder of young company than any other,” remarked Mrs. Thorn to Mrs. Sanger.

“So it looks at present,” returned the lawyer’s wife.

“Well, girls will be girls, I *s’pose* ; leastways, I never found that they wouldn’t. But I don’t think it’s just the thing to get into just such a frolic of laughter as they are having there the very first time she meets with the society. Do *you*, Mrs. Sanger ?”

“I can’t say I do. Yet, as you say, girls will be girls. However, perhaps we may feel it our duty to teach her a lesson or two yet. If it should be, I hope she will take it just as it’s intended.”

“She won’t ; she won’t. You never saw a *young* minister’s wife that would.”

“Well, I must say, then, that I shall set her an example, from which she will be able to see her proper place. How can we *expect* her to know about these things, so young and inexperienced ?”

"Sure enough, we can't. *I* don't, leastways. She's got to learn."

Carrie, did you pause to think, before entering on the path you had chosen, of the crosses and obstacles, mixed and multiplied, of the backbitings and envy, of the hasty speech and the hastier prejudices, of the spoken opinions and the unuttered faultfindings, that would be sure to follow you in your journey, like a pack of starving wolves after their prey? Did ever a dream sweep across your brain of the sinister motives that would be freely ascribed to your very goodness, and of the uncharitable versions that would be put upon your very benevolence?

Yes, yes; you thought of it all. You tried to realize it all. He whom you loved, and with whom you joined so nobly your earthly fortune, that with your feeble hands, under God, you might help in building up his kingdom, — he had told you of it all. There had been nothing kept back. The whole breadth and length of the story was spread before you. You determined to face all, to endure all, to try and *change* all — a harder task than heart like yours *could* understand.

But there was One who endured what you can never endure, though you go lingeringly through the windings of all earthly pains. He took upon himself wrongs far greater than humanity alone can ever suffer. It was only for your sake — for the sake of us all freely. And then it is sweet for you to know that your heart can be wounded, even ever so slightly, for his name. You can recall

his sufferings, — how they reviled and buffeted him, how they spat upon him and put on his head a crown of thorns, how they tried and crucified him, — and it makes all your petty trials seem small — O, *how* small! — by the comparison.

And you go forward in the path you have chosen, hoping to win over to yourself by love alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOING TO HOUSEKEEPING.

THE winter wore away slowly at Deacon Burroughs's, but quite pleasantly. Mr. Humphreys devoted himself with renewed zeal and energy to the task of his life, being constant in labor, ready in deeds of benevolence and sympathy, and openhearted and openhanded with all. As the society added to the number of its meetings, his wife found more favor at the hands of those who were at first so ready to judge her, and felt that she was gradually winning her way into their hearts. The objections some raised to her usefulness, on account of her youth, were soon in a fair way of being surmounted; and the very consideration of youth began, finally, to be her chief recommendation to their closest sympathies.

The agreement between the committee of the parish and the young minister amounted to this: they were to pay him, for the present, at the rate of four hundred and fifty dollars a year in money; he was to occupy the parsonage, as long as he staid with them, rent free; and the parish

promised, by presents and the like, to make up seventy-five or one hundred dollars additional, as their ability might be. For those days, when frugality and low prices ruled with all classes of people, this was esteemed a liberal offer; so Mr. Humphreys thought himself, and so his brethren in the neighboring towns told him.

In the month of March a quantity of furniture came over from Thornton, the provision of the young wife's father. The parsonage had been thoroughly repaired and cleaned, inside and out, and got ready for the reception of the furniture. Mr. Humphreys had been careful enough to lay up a little sum from the savings of his school teaching, and upon this he relied to begin housekeeping with. The task was quite as new to him as it was to his wife, or the other way either.

For several weeks previous he had been engaged in preparing his sermons in anticipation of this event, knowing that it would be too busy a time with him then to do justice to his texts or to himself. So he had three or four discourses ready to rely upon, until his feelings should be quieted enough for him to resume mental labor again.

They went, early in the morning, over to the parsonage, and staid till dinner time, and then back again after dinner, not returning until tea. Where lifting was to be done Mr. Humphreys had plenty of assistance, many of the men in the village volunteering their services, but Mr. Upton staying till the end. The ladies came in and made the carpets, and put them down, and insisted on arranging all

the furniture, putting up the beds, and setting things away in the closets. It was a real merrymaking for them, the younger ones especially.

Finally, they put all things in readiness. Nancy Rivers — or, as every body called her, old Nance — was at their right hand continually. She washed the paint and the windows, and scoured the floors, and did the severer part of the labors that devolved on her sex. The men brought in, one a ham, another a pair of late chickens, another a present of a pile of butter cakes, some one thing and some another. All seemed ready to open their hearts and their hands. Mr. Edward Buss, — he could hardly come himself, for he had more wall to lay and fence to put up than he could do in six months, (so he said;) but he sent over his ever-ready sister Nancy with a long link of sausages and a nice sparerib; and his wife sent in some of what she called her best brown bread and a small sage cheese; and Miss Nancy brought over all in the wagon with the wall-eyed mare, pulling lustily at the bits and chirruping gayly from the moment she turned into the village street till she drew up, in independent style, before the parsonage door.

The farmer, Mr. Johnson, — he did not seem to forget the “lift” Mr. Humphreys gave him at ploughing the spring before; and he brought down some corned beef and salt pork, telling his minister that nobody could go to house-keeping, and oughtn’t to *think* of such a thing, unless he had beef and pork in his cellar — this he considered the real, substantial standby of human existence.

Mr. Humphreys told them that, if matters went on at this rate, he should feel quite ready to set up a *store*, rather than the science of keeping house; at which they all laughed, and laughed still harder as the remark was followed by another present — this time, of potatoes and cabbages.

“I shall have nothing to buy,” he exclaimed. “I shall have a plenty to be benevolent with, following your own good example.”

Mr. Thistle, the keeper of the tavern, just then entered the kitchen, bearing a huge bag of meal on his back.

“Where’ll I put *this*, Mr. Humphreys?” he called out.

They received the call with a shout of laughter.

“But, with all this, I must keep pigs; and I had not thought of that just yet.”

“I’ve got *one* pig I’ll give you *now*,” said Mr. Johnson forthwith; “and I guess I can hunt you up another to go with it. Two will do better than one, you know.”

“I guess one will do all I shall want him to,” said Mr. Humphreys, thanking him in words that were but partially heard in the pleasant confusion of laughing voices.

Miss Buss thought the best part of it would be to look out and not eat up all they brought themselves, but to leave that part for the recipients of their bounty.

But Mr. Humphreys thought there would be quite enough left for himself, even if they ate all they wanted, and much more, too. And he begged them not to feel at all delicate about becoming his guests, as he was their grateful debtor.

Mrs. Humphreys was as grateful as grateful could be, and her manner showed it plainly enough. The very girlishness of her disposition, with which some of the older ones had found fault at first, added a native charm to the gratitude she tried vainly to utter, and attached them to her only the more. Nobody could be fresher, and more innocent, and truer in her feelings than she. With such persons as some of the ladies of our parish, how could it be other than a most welcome character for them to study?

When tea was got, on that first evening at the parsonage, after one of the busiest days the young husband and wife had ever known together, almost all their friends were gone. It was thought as well by them — for even the most uncharitable of them *could* be considerate, if they chose — to suffer the young couple to sit down at their first evening meal with their own uninterrupted thoughts. This certainly was a happy idea, and quite as delicate as it was happy. Yet both Mr. Humphreys and his wife insisted on Deacon Burroughs and his wife sitting down with them — it would seem so much more natural, and so much more like home, to see *them* at the table. So they complied with the request.

The tea was nice, and Mrs. Burroughs praised it. Mr. Humphreys thought if an old housekeeper, like Mrs. Burroughs, could praise his wife's first cup of tea, she had great cause to feel encouraged. Both the young people were a little awkward at first — or perhaps it was embarrassment, feeling rather more like being waited upon by the deacon

and his wife than like waiting on them. The tables were turned so suddenly it would take them some time to get used to it.

After supper, and the clearing away of the dishes, all sat in the charmed old family circle around the hearth, on which Mr. Humphreys had made a blazing fire of ash and hickory, and there talked freely and familiarly of the present and the future. How happy Carrie felt at that hour! What a yearning desire had she for her dear mother to sit down beside her in this her own room, in her own house, before her own blazing hearth! She tried many a time that evening to imagine Mrs. Burroughs stood in the stead of that mother; yet something was wanting to make so delightful a fancy quite real. Can there be any other feeling exactly like the feelings of a young housekeeper as she sits down to eat the first domestic meal, and dreams in the blaze of the first evening fire?

But it was earlier than nine o'clock when the deacon took his wife home; for he said he knew they must be completely worn out with the work and confusion, and needed rest as soon as they could get it. And he pleasantly urged them to shut up the house and go to bed.

This was in the early part of April. It was quite cold yet, for the spring had not come forward any faster than it is in the habit of doing nowadays. The snow was gone, except here and there in streaks and patches under the old stone walls, where it looked, over on the hillsides, like the rent shroud of the winter.

Carrie, in her new house, took greater delight than ever in watching the coming on of spring, and cast wistful eyes over the yard and garden, as if she longed already to be digging in the dirt among her plants. She pointed out spots where she would have certain trees and shrubs of her own choice planted; here a vine, and there a rose tree; here a clump of syringas, and there a small fir. The back door was to be made so neat and pleasant, in time; the rubbish should all be cleared away, and the fence be righted, and the ground swept clean and hard in the paths. And she meant to lay out a small bed of flowers in this corner, and train some sort of flowering vines under that window, and set a pretty bush a-growing right at this angle, where it would hide all roughnesses. O, there was hardly any telling what she was *not* going to do, and do it all that spring! She only longed for the weather to come warm enough for her to begin.

"I have thought of a pretty name to bestow on our pleasant little snuggerly here, Carrie," said Mr. Humphreys, while they sat over the fire one evening talking of contemplated improvements.

"Do let me have it, then; for I have kept my thoughts quite busy of late on that very subject," returned she. "What is your name?"

"Ingleside." He gave her a short pause to get its full sound. "Ingleside," he repeated. "Do you like it?"

"Sweet indeed! I like it exceedingly. It suggests many pleasant thoughts and feelings to me. Then 'Ingle-

side' is the name of this dear place from this day henceforth. It shall be known as such by our friends every where."

"But the place needs some dressing up," continued he, "or people of good taste, and of the right sentiment, will laugh at the inconsistency between the thing itself and its name. Now this little porch before the door,—that can be improved so much that even the oldest inhabitants won't know it. I can give it a robe of leaves that will beautify it beyond what you now imagine."

"Yes," said she, catching his spirit; "the woodbine, or the honeysuckle, or the trumpet creeper—yes, there are a plenty of flowering vines to make our selection from. I want something that will grow rapidly, and yet grow handsome."

"And profusely too. Nothing is prettier than the honeysuckle—the white species in particular. Its flower is so fragrant, too, it would scent the whole house when the windows are open."

"And let's have a couple of firs to stand sentry by the two posts of the gate! I like that idea."

"It is a good one; and two firs shall be put there. Then I can get two evergreens from the woods myself, that people think good for nothing except to grow in the woods out of sight, and these I shall put one on each side of the walk, in the centre of the plot. Do you want flower beds?"

"Yes; two narrow ones just each side of the path; they

relieve the green of the grass beyond, and are a pleasant attraction to the eye of a stranger."

"I trust none will be strangers here," remarked Mr. Humphreys. "I hope it will seem like home to all my little flock."

"And these little improvements are exactly what will make it look like home to them sooner than any thing else. They will expect to find happiness where these beautiful things form the outworks. There is little misery among flowers. They betray the traits of the heart as soon as any thing can."

As the season opened, therefore, and the sun began to grow warmer, and the soft rains to beat gently and fertilizingly on the mellow earth, they joined hands in the out-of-door work, giving their little grounds as busy an appearance as those of the busiest farm. They hoed, and planted, and watered; they dug up and covered; they spaded and set out; they sowed seeds, and fixed frames on which the expected flowers were to run. The villagers stopped now and then, as they went by, to observe the progress they made in their pleasant morning and evening labors, and wondered how it was that some people could make a spot look so like an earthly paradise that others would always suffer to remain desert ground.

By the middle of June their toils began to exhibit the first fruits. All things seemed to do well. The firs, though they should have been set out the November before, perhaps, were thrifty and green. The seeds sprang

up profusely. The vines began to twine around the posts of the little porch, and promised to be soon climbing to the cornices and the roof. There was every thing to encourage them in the prospect. They could already look forward in hope to the days when they might really sit under their own vine, though the literal fig tree should be wanting.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HEART OF A CREDITOR.

THESE annals have to do with all classes and characters of people in our parish, or they would neither be impartial nor give the exact impressions that should be given of the relation between pastor and people. These do not meet simply on Sundays, and afterward go separate ways through the week; their connection is close the week through. What touches the sympathies of the one naturally moves those of the other. In country parishes is this especially true.

There was sickness in the humble dwelling of Mr. Chauncey, that stood off the main road, at the farther north end of the village — his eldest girl, the oldest of three children, being marked for the victim. The house was a very poor affair, although it had for many years sufficed to protect the laboring man's little brood. It was destitute outwardly of the signs of comfort that all men with a healthy state of heart naturally covet — there being no fence to keep off intrusions from the open road and give an air of

home to the place, and the wood pile accumulating chips and rubbish for them rather faster than it could be used.

In all, there were Mr. Chauncey, and his wife, and his three children ; the eldest, named Mary, could not at this time have been more than between six and seven years, while the youngest was a mere infant. Mr. Chauncey had always been a hardworking man, temperate and industrious, and seemingly anxious to get forward in the world. Yet he had never been able to reach even the beginning of his desires, for he was still very poor and involved in debt. The house he had lived in so many years was rented of a farmer who lived out of the village—a rather hard man, with little disposition about his house except a very decided one to obtain his rent money just as fast as it became due. In order to meet this demand, the poor man was often obliged to pay his way in labor for the farmer, when he was pretty sure to throw in more than his landlord ever did, as the poor invariably do. Why is it that *they* are expected to be so liberal in adjusting accounts, while the other and more favored side are never, or rarely ever, guilty of concession ?

Little Mary Chauncey was very sick indeed. She had been ailing for several days before she had finally taken to her bed ; and her mother deferred this latter necessity as long as she could. But now it could be put off no longer.

The father was anxious ; but he had no time to indulge in feelings like that. Early and late he must be at his

work, or he would be thrown out of employment entirely. No one can tell what his thoughts were, however, while alone in the fields where he wrought through the long days. Still, he felt that to labor was his duty, he being the only stay of the house ; if he should stop work, who would pay the doctor's bills and the medicine bills ? who would provide for the well ones, that they might minister to the needs of the sick ?

When he came home at night, tired and jaded as he always was, he sat down, as soon as he entered the house, by the bedside of his little girl, and asked her how she felt, and if she was not going to get well, and said what he thought might encourage her and raise her dying spirits. He could not yet see all that his wife thought she could see. He could not understand how much her heart and strength failed her, from day to day, as the watchful mother could. He was not able to see how the eyes, once bright and full, grew more and more sunken, as he looked anxiously into them each recurring night. This was left for the mother alone.

He came home from his labor, one night, rather later than usual, and much more tired than he had been in many days. After going to the bedside, and speaking tenderly a few moments to his child, and gently brushing away the hair with his rough hand from her forehead and temples, he went and took his chair beside the open window in the kitchen. The child was lying on the bed, in a little bed room.

Hardly had he seated himself when his wife approached and laid her hand on his arm. He looked up, evidently much troubled.

"What — what?" he stammered in a low voice. "Do you think she's any better, mother?"

"I'm afraid," she answered; and her emotion appeared to choke her utterance.

"Has the doctor been here to-day? He didn't come yesterday, you know."

"Yes; he left her this afternoon."

"What did *he* say about her?"

"Nothing at all, only that she must have the very closest watching, and be kept as quiet as she could. He shook his head, though, and looked very solemn about it."

The father, for a moment, was silent and thoughtful. He had, for some days, been troubled a good deal about many things that he had carefully kept all knowledge of from his wife; was this other far more terrible trouble about to break over his head, and weigh down his heart to the very dust?

"I'm *afraid*," again remarked the mother. "The symptoms are dreadful bad. What if we should *lose her*?" and she put her apron to her eyes.

"O, don't — don't feel so! It *can't* be that *that* trouble's in store for us. What *have* we done to deserve any thing so dreadful as that?"

"Isn't there something lackin', James? Don't we *deserve* some such affliction as this?"

The question silenced him.

"Perhaps we're ungrateful," she sadly continued. "But I've tried not to be. And Mary's always been such a good little girl, and is always so ready to do for me. James, how *can* we think of it?"

He threw his eyes out the window into the shadows of the road. For some moments he appeared lost in his own saddened reflections.

"Her pulse isn't so good as it has been; it's more irregular. Poor Mary! — poor, dear little one! How *can* I think of it?"

She paced quietly to and fro for some time. At length she started and went to the side of the sick one. The father's ears were open to every syllable.

"Don't you feel any better, Mary?" her mother asked the child, employing a tone of the most tender compassion. "Does your head hurt you as much as it did?"

The child, who had been dozing, opened her large blue eyes, and looked straight up in her mother's face at the question.

"Don't you feel so well, Mary?" repeated Mrs. Chauncey.

"I don't know," half whined the little lamb, turning her face over on the pillow; and the faint reply was followed by a groan.

"Don't you know mother?"

No answer.

The distressed mother laid her palm across the child's hot forehead.

"*Can it be,*" thought she to herself, — "*can it be that I must lose this dear child? Who shall be to me then what she has been — what she is now? Poor, dear thing! If I only knew what I could do to relieve you, it would be done in a minute. If I could but think of any thing for you I have not thought of yet, how gladly I would hasten to do all there was left undone!*"

And other thoughts that mother had, and shadows of thoughts, while standing over the bed of her sick child, in that summer evening, such as she dared not pursue whither they sought to carry her — such as trailed long clouds of gloom over her sky, almost blotting out hope. Ah, how hard it is to tell what, at such times, may be the sufferings of a mother! How poor is the richest sympathy at an hour when the heart hungers for more than any earthly sympathy can yield!

She had forgotten about her husband's supper, and so indeed had he. It was all ready for him on the table against his coming; and there it still stood, untasted. Eating was not a thing thought of then. Grief had consumed appetite itself, and troubled thought had driven out every thing else.

While the mother still stood over the bed, she heard her husband's footsteps, across the naked kitchen floor, going to the door and then speedily returning. She stepped to the bed-room entrance to see if he wanted any thing.

"I'll help you to your supper in a minute," whispered she,

a tear starting slowly down one of her cheeks, but which it was too dark to perceive.

"No matter, now, for that," he quickly answered, betraying much excitement, yet striving hard to keep it down. "How is she? How *is* Mary?"

"No better, I'm afraid. But what *ails* you, James? Has any thing happened? Tell me quick."

"Nothing more'n what I've been expectin' this many a day; but I've tried to keep it all from *you*. You'll have to know it *now*, though."

"James, what *do* you mean? Tell me."

For the first time, having now reached the middle of the kitchen, she perceived the figure of a man standing in the doorway.

"Who's that?" she quickly asked, much excited.

"He? That's the deputy sheriff. He's after *me*. I must go, I s'pose."

"What does he want of you? James, *tell* me — have you done any thing wrong?"

"No more than to owe a man more'n I can pay him as soon as he wants me to. So I'm goin' to jail — that's all."

He spoke in a tone that betrayed the effort his feelings made to deaden themselves altogether at this most trying juncture. Well enough did he know from what he was about to be separated, — a single thought laid all that before him, — but he was struggling, like a drowning man for salvation, to keep all that back, out of sight, till the dreadful reality should come upon him itself.

"Let me see my little ones *once* more," he said, groping his way into the bed room. "Mary — dear little Mary?" he called. But she did not answer him.

"So sick!" said he, pitifully, smoothing her hot forehead and kissing it. The child gave a slight troubled groan. "If 'twould only get well again, its father would feel so glad! Poor little Mary!" — and she groaned again.

The mother stood just at the bed-room door, undetermined in her confusion what to do or what ought to be done. She laid her hands on her husband's arm as he came out, and looked up into his face. It was not yet the moment for grief. The suddenness of this shock had nerved her to a temporary strength she could have got nowhere else. She was even calm — he, too, was calm, in the midst of that terrible tempest.

"James," said she, in a low voice, "are you going to leave me at such a time as this? — little Mary almost dying! nobody here with me, and nobody to send for help! James — *James!*"

O, how those syllables, every one of them, went like deadly bolts through his soul, tearing and rending every thing in their way!

"Don't say another word!" he replied, fearfully calm. "I *must* go. There's no help for it. Poor little Mary! God help you all!"

"But what is it *for*? Who sends you to jail for a debt at *this* time? Can't you be allowed to stay with me even till morning — till we know how it will be with the poor child?"

"No — no. It's all over with me. I must go. This man has rode ten miles for me, and wants to get back as soon as he can. You'll find out all about it soon enough! Good by!" — and he wrung her hand.

"Come! I'm waiting, Chauncey!" called the man at the door, rather impatiently.

"Only keep up courage while I'm gone — that's all! I *can't* have to stay long, that's certain. It does seem as if some o' the men I've worked for *would* help me in such a dreadful strait as this. Good by, then! Sha'n't I *never* see little Mary again? Poor thing — *poor thing!*"

Was ever a sigh of deeper anguish drawn from human heart than that which followed from his heart after these words were spoken?

He went out through the door, leaving his wife watching his retreating figure as it vanished into the dark. He had left all his world behind him; wife, children, hearthstone, all! Death was hovering over that humble roof with his broad wing, threatening, vulture-like, to snatch the most promising one of the whole flock. Ah, what a wall of blank despair hemmed him in now on every side! What harpy thoughts crouched around his heart, ready to tear it asunder and divide among themselves the scattered fragments! How many deaths died he in that single night — a night full of apprehensions, and grief, and wretchedness, and fear!

The distracted wife, now coming suddenly to the full sense of her afflictive desolation, glanced at the untasted

supper on the table, and burst into tears. That sight was the last little straw laid on the great burden of her sorrows; and before that she yielded in a moment.

The debtor went rattling off over the darkened country road in the direction of the county town, offering up himself and all his quickest and dearest sympathies to satisfy the ravenous appetite of the law; a law, in justice to the progressive spirit of humanity, let it be said, that has long since (as a general thing) been swept out of existence.

What a night for the deserted wife and helpless mother! How often did she pray for the assistance, trifling as it might be, that never came! How frequent were her prayers, how fervent, how oft repeated, that Heaven would kindly interpose to stop the burning, destroying fever of this grief!

The hours were long — O, *how* long! Alone in that far-off house, cut off, as it were, from human sympathy, her heart preying hungrily on itself, — whose is the condition that could appeal more successfully to compassion than hers?

It was a little after two o'clock, by the little wooden clock on the shelf, when she leaned over the bed of little Mary and watched her breathing. It seemed frightfully quick, and irregular, and unequal.

She spoke to her. But the child made no answer.

She put her cheek down to the little one's cheek. "Mary," she whispered, "don't you love your dear mother?"

The breathing came and went, faster and faster, slighter

and slighter. There was nothing left of it. It was gone!

The mother put her fingers on the thin wrist to feel the pulse. It had done throbbing. Life had gone out with its low ebbing.

Darling child! it was a saint in heaven! Poor mother! who can measure grief with such as you?

And he who should have been there at that humble bedside to catch the dying breath of his first-born, — he who had toiled daily with hands and brain to compass the fond dreams he cherished for his darling child, — he who alone could have divided that poor mother's grief, and shared with her the burden that crushed her single heart, — he was watching through the dreary night in his dismal room, counting his own pulse, or noting the beatings of his heart, and hoping against hope itself that the dawn would find his child still alive. Alas! what a vain mockery are even the most meagre of our hopes! What pitfalls are dug for us at every step of our way, that we may finally learn where to repose our trust, and to whom to go for help in times of distress!

Mr. Humphreys visited the poor woman, as soon as he heard of her double affliction the next day, and immediately set measures on foot through the village to release the father in time for the burial ceremonies of his child. Money enough was soon collected to pay the amount of the debt, together with the costs of execution; and straightway the clergyman himself rode over to the county town

to communicate the unwelcome news of his child's death to the unhappy father, and bring him back with him.

It finally appeared that Mr. Sanger, the village lawyer, had been heartless enough to press the collection of the debt in such a manner ; and it long afterwards came out, too, that he treasured no special good will towards Mr. Humphreys for interesting himself, as he expressed it, "in a matter that didn't concern *him* in the least, and went only to offering an insult to his own feelings."

As if *such* a man's feelings were of a nature to suffer at any time from an insult !

CHAPTER XVI.

ONLY FAMILY MATTERS.

AUTUMN brought new joy to the heart of our young minister and his wife, and they thought their cup was overflowing. It is impossible to conceive of persons more thoroughly and entirely happy than were they.

Mrs. Humphreys presented her husband with twin children — both boys! They were named Alfred and Arthur.

The little parsonage, full of light before, seemed now but an illumination. From ridge pole to cellar apartment it was aglow with the heat of the new happiness. The mother was grateful as only mothers' hearts can be. Hers was a feeling that compelled tears, tears of such thankful joy as never before had rained from her eyes. She blessed God for his gift; but how earnest was her prayer for strength to guard faithfully her trust, that she might surrender it again with clean hands and a clear conscience!

All the ladies of the parish flocked in, as soon after this notable announcement as was proper, eager to lend both

assistance and sympathy. They were exceedingly kind, and their seasonable offers added greatly to the young mother's happiness. She could hardly thank them enough for their voluntary services.

Mr. Humphreys received the congratulations of the men of the village for days together. Indeed, to one who took a little pains to adjust his opinion nicely, it would seem as if they must be almost as much rejoiced at the event as himself.

Ellen Walters — a girl not above sixteen years of age — used to come in almost every day and sit with Mrs. Humphreys, reading aloud to her from such books as she preferred, and engaging her in pleasant conversation. While the young mother was convalescing, this was a companionship especially acceptable to her. Ellen was a girl to whom Carrie's sympathies had freely gone out on the occasion of their very first meeting. She was motherless, and — Carrie thought she looked — almost friendless. Little enjoyment did she seem to take with the other village girls of her own age, withdrawing rather into the silent circle of her own thoughts, and there communing with herself undisturbed. It was not a shade of misanthropy; farthest from that of all other things. But she appeared to wear constantly a garb of sadness, that sat on her like her own robes of mourning. Her figure was very slight, and her face very pale; and from her large and luminous eyes beamed a light that seemed to stream from the very depths of her soul, confessing her every thought,

and feeling, and affection, and desire. There was a dreaminess, too, in her look that attracted while it half frightened you. It was not of earth, giving back the superficial radiance that danced into it from the things of this world, but a look that reached far backward strangely into the past, and led you silently, you knew not how, far forward into the illimitable future.

Her first affection for this sad-faced girl Carrie had steadily cherished, until, at a time like this, when only the closest human sympathies are really of any worth, she took her wholly into her heart, and shared with her the feelings the sex can share with itself alone.

So that Ellen Walters became a daily visitant at the parsonage. Generally she remained there all day — now waiting on the young mother with cheerfulness, now talking with her gently and listening in turn to her gentle talk, and now reading from favorite books aloud, books of Christian writers, poems and essays. These were profitable days for both of them. Under their influence Carrie improved sensibly. Mr. Humphreys could remain peaceably at his labors in the study, knowing that she whom he loved was in such tender hands. All things progressed finely, the health of Carrie being not the least among them.

During one of their conversations, Ellen, after looking thoughtfully into the little blaze for some minutes, presently spoke of the fear most people had of dying; for herself, she said, she had no fear. It was rather a

pleasant thought, bringing up to her heart the realization of all the endeared wishes it had reached forward to from its earliest days.

"Do you feel quite *ready* to go whenever you may be called?" asked Carrie, falling at once into the subject on which she was glad to talk with her.

"Perhaps I may not have true *faith*," returned the child — for merely a child she was in innocency as well as years. "Sometimes I think I am too impatient; I do not quietly wait on the Lord's will; but I pray to be rid of such feelings. I desire only to be in my own good Father's hands."

"That is what you certainly ought to desire, Ellen. If your heart strains after any thing else, or grows impatient in the least degree under the restraints God sees proper to impose, be sure your faith is not the *true* faith. That begets nothing but humility and trust. If you have that, you will be happy under any trials that may rise in your path. You will not only bear them, but you will bear them gladly, knowing how willing your Savior was to bear his great burden for you; you will rejoice in them, not with a vain and empty rejoicing, but because you will feel that your example under them is working out the salvation of other souls that are groaning with lesser loads than yours. Think of this often, dear Ellen."

The girl became thoughtful and silent again.

"You say you are not afraid to die ——"

"I think I am not," mildly interposed she.

“But are you quite *ready* to die? I mean, do you feel that you have done all there is to be done by you in winning other hearts to Christ? Can you truly say that the whole of your influence is spent? Is there not another wish you can realize here respecting the spread of God’s kingdom and the knowledge of his grace? Do you feel, and can you *say* that you feel, as if all you had been sent here to do is already done, and done faithfully, without a mistake or an omission, with nothing left that you would have had performed? Can you, from your heart, say this, dear Ellen?”

The girl buried her face in her hands and wept.

Carrie left her to indulge in her grief for a few moments, and then asked, —

“Why are these tears, Ellen? What do they mean? Open your heart to me, and let me share your sympathies freely.”

“O, I am *so* bad!” sobbed the stricken girl. “I feel *so* wicked. I *know* I do wrong all the time. It makes me feel so terribly unhappy.”

“But what makes you have this impression? You will not do wrong purposely, at least, if you strive to imitate Christ in every thing. Do you study his dear example as you ought?”

“No — no — no. But I am *so* wicked. I *know* I am so wicked. No one talks to me about it as you do, and I feel sometimes as if I were a great deal better than those

around me. But I don't feel so when *you* talk to me. It makes me so debased in my own eyes to hear you speak of goodness and of God; and then I sometimes think I never *can* be accepted. O, what would I give to be as *you* are, Mrs. Humphreys! *Can I ever be?*"

"And what am I? Nothing more than the same poor sinner you are yourself — nothing better than the very worst of all sinners. I must go where the basest must go, if I hope to obtain pardon and peace — at the foot of the cross. I must humble myself continually, and bruise my heart, and break my pride. Nothing can avail me but complete and unconditional submission. If I come short of that, Christ will not own me as his. He will have only *the whole* of our hearts. He seeks not a corner, where he may hide himself from the world's opposition. He demands the whole, where he may crush all worldly opposition, and *reign*. Now, can you not give him the whole of *your* heart, dear Ellen? Is there any thing this earth can offer you worth a moment's comparison with his boundless and exhaustless love? Is there any safety so perfect as that which he offers you freely in his arms? Ellen, why will you not give all up to him? See how patiently he waits on you. See how lovingly he intercedes for you, that you may at last be wholly acceptable. Can you point any where to love so priceless, so undying, as this?"

Ellen laid her face against the bed, near which she had drawn her low chair, and wept sobbingly. Her heart, gen-

tle and docile as it seemed to others, was yet flinty. The purifying waters had never yet gushed out of it. It had never been smitten with the real power of truth, that the stream might find its way to the surface. But now the sealed fountain seemed opened. Those hot tears, gushing so profusely from her eyes,—they betrayed sufficiently the disturbed spirit within, that would never find rest again save in the arms of its Savior.

Carrie suffered her to remain in the position she had taken without disturbing her. And thus she continued for quite half an hour. Presently she asked the weeping girl if she did not now feel that she could make the offering that was demanded of her without a murmur of complaint.

No answer yet. And silence was in the chamber again, save when broken by the irregular sobs of the sorrowing girl.

Mr. Humphreys came quietly into the room while this was going on, and stopped short for an explanation of it all. Carrie at once narrated to him what had passed, and begged him to try and comfort her stricken heart by directing it where comfort could only be obtained.

Immediately he took her gently by the hand, and led her unresistingly to the foot of the bed. There he knelt down beside her, her face buried in her hands, and offered a prayer. It was such a prayer as could come only from a true believer's heart and lips. It carried all the poor

child's wants to the feet of Jesus, and there besought aid in this moment of urgent need. O, how cooling did it seem to the feverish heart of Ellen! How gratefully refreshing did its words fall on the parched soil of her feelings, as the seasonable rains drop on the dried bosom of the earth! What a new light seemed dawning on her soul, as if the morning of her true life had just risen! What gratitude, what wonder, what praise, what deep and unutterable joy successively rose from her heart, as from an altar breathing incense and sweetest perfumes!

He afterwards talked with her, gently yet earnestly. All the mercies of her Savior, all his voluntary gifts and sacrifices, all his free offers and invitations were severally rehearsed to her; and then came up the single inquiry, — it could not be delayed, it must have an answer, — “Can you give up all — *all* — to Christ? He will take nothing except unconditionally and freely. He will possess no part unless he can have the whole.”

Yes — yes — yes. The answer *was* made. The heart *was* given — O, how freely and entirely!

That night there was greater cause for happiness than ever in the dear little parsonage. A soul had been won to God. Heaven had opened to let in another spirit into the fold.

As Ellen laid her head on her pillow, — the pillow that morning saw wet with tears, — she felt that she

would live—live to do the work she now saw it was hers to do; live to work with her example, under God, wherever its little light might be set.

What a different frame was that in which her mind now viewed every object connected with life! What a field opened now before her eyes, where hitherto she had seen nothing for her feeble hands to do!

CHAPTER XVII.

A COUNTRY WEDDING.

I SHALL make no special effort, in the course of these annals, to observe very nicely the rules of synchronism, well aware that their general interest can in this way be nowise impaired. I am endeavoring, kind reader, to sketch for you such salient points, in the experience of the new minister in our parish, as will give some sufficient idea of the lives of all of us together, and of the endeared relation that for so many years subsisted between our pastor and our people. A narrative of natural sequence would hardly have answered this end as effectively as the picking out single events, scattered here and there over our mutual experiences, and binding them together in the little sheaf I have herewith presented.

The twins got on finely. As the winter came and went, and the new spring opened, all their little infantile traits budded and expanded in the genial atmosphere of home. The parents lived, it seemed, double lives in their very existence.

In the early part of the spring, when no one but Miss Buss happened to be there at the parsonage, playing with the babies, a quite unique-looking establishment was driven up before the door, and two as picturesque-looking individuals alighted.

"Now, I wonder who all *that* is," exclaimed Miss Buss, laying down the baby she held rather suddenly, and hurrying to the window. "They travel 'most as independent as *I* do sometimes."

Mrs. Humphreys could not repress a smile herself.

"Strangers this way, I guess," added Miss Buss. "But, *dear* me, I wonder if they don't know who lives here. Jest see 'em stare about. I sh'd think they'd jest come all the way from Joppy. Did ever you *look* at such a pair, Miss Humphreys?"

They had hitched their horse to a tree, and walked very self-possessedly up the front path. The man was busying himself with wearing the skin off his knuckles against the door.

"Don't he know, now, there's a knocker on that door?" broke out Miss Buss again. "A body'd *think*, sure enough, that them great eyes of his *wasn't* any thing but peeled onions; and I believe I could stick onions in a man's face a good deal handsomer than his are done, too."

Mrs. Humphreys tried pleasantly to check her; but it was to little purpose. She had found just such specimens of attire, just such manners, physiognomies, and general peculiarities as served to excite her agreeably. She would follow up her enjoyment as long as it lasted her.

Mrs. Humphreys went to the door.

The man made a bow, and paused to stare at her with a pair of very gray eyes.

She felt obliged herself to speak first. The man seemed too much lost in wonder to begin, though his travelling companion was perseveringly jogging his elbow with considerable emphasis, scowling formidably at him, and moving her lips in low and inaudible ejaculations.

"Do you wish to see Mr. Humphreys?" mildly inquired Carrie, looking from one face to the other.

"Don't the minister live here?" stammered forth the man, and feeling apparently relieved that the ice was finally broken.

"Yes," answered she.

"I thought so," he returned.

"Then, Jacob, — then why don't ye ——"

His female companion could get no farther for the stammering tongue that tripped her speech to the ground.

"Yes, *yes*," said he, shaking her away rather impatiently from his elbow. "Yes, I'm *goin'* to. Wal," he began again with Mrs. Humphreys, "we'd like pretty well to see him."

"Certainly," replied she; and ran quickly up the stairs to call him at his study door.

In the mean time, seeing the door of the sitting room wide open, just as Carrie in her haste had left it, our friends took a new start, and walked deliberately in.

There sat Miss Buss; but, from her countenance, she

would be received as any body else quite as quick. Her face turned a ruddy red, more brilliant than the leaves of the oak in the frosts of autumn. She pierced the strangers through and through with her keen eyes,—the lady especially,—surveying their garments and general proportions from head to foot.

The man took off his bell-crowned hat, holding it by the rim on the tips of the fingers of each hand, while he kept it swinging much like the ringing of the article after which the shape of its crown was named, staring quite curiously about over the walls and the furniture. He stood; but his companion did not feel the same necessity incumbent on herself; so she dropped quietly down into the first chair that offered.

The babies were lying on a little rocker crib that stood in the room, both awake, and actively kicking, and “googling” at their chubby mouths.

“*I d’clare!*” exclaimed he, as soon as they came within the range of his acute observation. “What *be* they? twins?”

Miss Buss assured him he wasn’t at all out of the way in his conjecture.

“*I d’clare!*” said he. “Who’d ha’ thought it? Lucy, jest look at ’em.”

She who was thus appealed to half rose from her chair, stretched out her neck far enough to take a peep over the edge of the crib, and sat down instantly again. Apparently, she thought she had no time to throw away on sights of any description.

“Pretty!” exclaimed she, in a very small voice.

He looked down approvingly into her face, and bestowed on her one of the most meaningless smiles it is possible to conceive of.

At this moment Mrs. Humphreys came down stairs. Not seeing her visitors at first in the outside door where she had left them, and they having concealed themselves from her eyes by the intervention of the opened sitting-room door, she unwittingly exclaimed, as if a little perplexed, —

“Why, they have gone!”

The man succeeded in catching her words. Immediately he stepped forward, and called out to Mrs. Humphreys in the entry, —

“No; here we be.”

Carrie’s face colored as she again accosted the alert stranger, and she could hardly keep back the smile that would persist in playing about her lips. As she shut the door and entered the room, she apprised them that Mr. Humphreys was not at home: he had gone out for a walk.

“How unfort’nate!” said the man, looking into his patient companion’s countenance, while he gave his hat another jerk that almost swung it clear from his hands. He evidently had the science of bell ringing in his mind as he persistently performed these several gyrations with his tile.

“What sh’ll we do?” he asked her.

“Won’t you take a seat, and wait until Mr. Humphreys comes?” asked Carrie.

"Wal, I do' *know*. I don't well see how I *can*."

Miss Buss was very curious to understand why *he* couldn't take a seat as well as his partner in the business.

"We're in sunthin' of a hurry, you see," he remarked, looking at a chair he was about taking.

"Yes, we air," acquiesced the woman.

"We've got *ten miles* to ride," said he; "and our ole horse ain't none of the smartest, jest now. He hasn't been out o' the plough long enough yit to pick up his nat'ral trav'lin' powers much. However, I guess we'll wait *a little while*; I don't see exackly what we can do any *better*."

"I hope 'twon't be very *long*!" exclaimed his companion.

He finally sat down.

"You see," said he, half winking at his travelling partner, while he addressed himself to Mrs. Humphreys, "we're talkin' o' gettin' *married*!" — and he wound up the confession by giving his intended a full and frank look straight in her face.

"You s'pose the horse'll stand, don't you?" she inquired, trying to change the topic a trifle.

"*Stan'*! I guess he won't *go*! — not unless that air tree out there goes *with* him!"

Miss Buss seemed really delighted to think that she had happened over at the parsonage at so interesting a time as this. Not for a moment did she take her eyes off of them, but studied every one of their peculiar and somewhat original characteristics with quite all the earnest ap-

plication of a portrait painter. Miss Buss, for once at least, had her hands full.

"It's expensive business, sometimes, gettin' married," he premised, for the information of all present.

"Jacob!" whispered the woman, as if the others could not hear.

"What do you s'pose I may have to pay, now?" he went on; "if your man goes to puttin' it *too high*, I shall have to give it up entirely, and take Lucy back home again!"

"There's justices enough to do it, ain't there?" inquired she of him.

"O, certain; certain there is; but *justices*, you see, ain't jest the thing! It wants a real *minister* to do it as it orter be done. Didn't your old friend Margaret Muck git married that way? And how long, I want to know, did the knot stay tied? Not six months! No, Lucy; I say if't *does* cost more, *I'm* for havin' it done as it should be, so 't'll *stay*! Then we can go about our business agin, and 'not all the time be worryin' about the knot's gittin' ontied. This only half doin' a thing — even gittin' married, now — ain't, in *my* opinion, the thing at all. S'pose it *does* cost more; you'll find it the cheapest in the end! Yes — yes!" — and he went to swinging his bell crown busily between his knees again.

"Mabbe so," answered his intended.

"You are not obliged to give the clergyman that marries you more than you feel able to give," remarked Mrs Humphreys.

"There, now!" exclaimed the woman. "What did I tell you, Jacob?"

Her face brightened like the rising of the moon.

"Is that *so*?" asked he, thoroughly surprised at the very agreeable nature of the intelligence.

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Humphreys.

Miss Buss laughed; it was more than she could do to help it.

"P'raps you ain't married yit?" suggested the man.

Miss Buss only colored; but she could not have spoken a plainer answer.

"Wal, now," said he, "when you and your man come to talk the matter over, p'raps this item of the *price* 'll somehow git into your account."

"Mabbe so," chimed in she whom he called his Lucy.

"Now, if it does, jest think of it as *we* think of it — that 'taint such a very larfin' matter. It ain't, depend on't!"

Miss Buss was cured of her laughing, certainly; yet her sense of mirth was in a state of continual titillation. She seemed to relish the unexpected scene highly.

"I wish he'd come!" said the woman, at length, in a low voice.

"So do I, Lucy. But wishin' won't fetch him. Miss — Miss — really, I can't speak your name," said he, addressing the clergyman's wife.

"Mrs. Humphreys," she assisted him.

"Wal, Miss Humphreys, if you'll jest tell me where

you think he's gone, I'll go and hunt him up. It's no use a-waitin' in *this* way. It's losin' precious time, jest like losin' shinin' dollars."

"I could not tell you where he has gone," said Carrie, rising and going to the window to look out on the street. "But I should think he would come back pretty soon."

"Mabbe so," said the intended bride.

Miss Buss smiled very broadly again, her face turning redder than ever.

The door from the back room suddenly opened, and unravelled the entanglement of their perplexities at once. Mr. Humphreys himself stood before them.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Carrie, glad to know they were now to be relieved of their trouble.

The clergyman stood a moment and looked round the room. The sight rather staggered him. He was quite sure that neither of those countenances was a familiar one to him. He looked at his wife for an explanation.

"These persons wish you to marry them," she explained.

"Ah!" was his exclamation; and in a moment every thing became properly adjusted in his mind.

"We've come to git married," said the groom, half rising from his chair, while he pushed his feet far forward, as if for a fair start in a race not yet announced.

"Yes," answered Mr. Humphreys; and immediately he set about satisfying himself that they were legal candidates for that ceremony. It appearing that all the pre-

liminaries had been regular and proper, he made known his readiness to proceed with the rite by requesting them to stand up. The man not only complied, on his part, but he held up his right hand beside.

“No need of that,” whispered Mr. Humphreys, smiling. And then he asked the bridegroom to stand a little nearer his prospective bride. He had got off where he could gaze exactly in her face!

After offering such counsel as clergymen usually give to those who present themselves for matrimony, and such as he conjectured might be serviceable in the particular cases of the couple before him, he proceeded to consummate the union; which was done in a very brief time, even the bridegroom himself not knowing when he had got through.

“Is that *all*?” asked the astonished man.

“Certain,” answered his now inspirited bride, looking round on the others and laughing.

Mrs. Humphreys brought in a plate of plain cake, making an excuse for its not being more worthy of the wedding guests. Her husband handed it to them, urging them to partake.

The man held off a moment. He had a new thought in his head. “P’raps ’twould bring the cost of the marriage higher!”

“O, no; you are perfectly welcome to it. It is the custom, too, for the clergyman’s wife to furnish these little things at such times; and she gets the fee for her pay.”

“O, *that’s* it, is it?” exclaimed the bridegroom, helping

himself to a generous slice, and urging his better half not to be at all backward now; "'twon't *cost* any more, you know," he added.

As they rose to go, Mr. Humphreys followed them to the door to see them off. While standing in the entry, the bridegroom slipped a paper into the clergyman's hand, saying, as he did so, "That makes us *even*, I b'lieve!" Mr. Humphreys bowed them out to the gate, and returned to his wife and Miss Buss.

"Here is *your* part of it, Carrie," said he, placing the paper in her hand.

She unfolded it, — which, in fact, was not a little labor, — and there lay nestled down at the bottom of the wrapper — a bright half dollar! Mr. Humphreys could not refrain from the pleasant merriment that moved him.

"And that's what folks call gettin' *married*, is it?" said Miss Buss. "Well, I don't think it's such a *very* awful thing, after all!"

No, Miss Buss; you are not alone in the world in your candid and striking opinion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWO IN HEAVEN.

ROSES without thorns, — who has ever found them?

What is life but an alternation of sunshine and cloud, light and darkness?

What would give strength to our sympathies, quickness to our compassion, or healthy life to our natures, did not troubles obtrude their terrible forms now and then between our vision and the sun, or gloomy mists brood over our heads in the valleys of affliction?

The days, and weeks, and months went on.

Ingleside was a little earthly paradise. Life went pleasantly there, for the great ends of life were fully answered. The inmates were at work in their Master's vineyard faithfully; and labor brings its own abundant reward, especially labor in Christ's own cause.

The heads and the hearts there were always active. As time slipped away, the duties became more extended and complicated. New sets of personal and parish interests

arose. The people needed now what, a little time before, was no want with them. Other modifications or expansions of feeling were visible, for which constant and ready provision must be made by the faithful pastor. Interest in religious matters increased, yet not so much as to exercise a controlling influence among the people.

The young clergyman wrought perseveringly and with deep faith at all his duties, praying that God would finally give the increase. He passed much of the time in his study, although he meant to rob neither his family nor his parish of what rightfully belonged to them. In season and out of season Mr. Humphreys was at his post of duty. No one afforded him greater assistance in his labors than good Deacon Burroughs, though the deacon's wife had rather steadily persisted lately in showing coldness in her manner towards the inmates at Ingleside. Deacon Congdon was a good man, too; but his coöperation was not of exactly that sort offered by his friend Deacon Burroughs. The latter made his influence vital, because it was eminently personal. Every thing he took hold of had a way of prospering. His soul was in his work; and it was a work he never looked forward to the end of. All he desired was to be accounted faithful, and faithful to the last moment of life.

Ellen Walters was as constant a visitor at Ingleside as she ever had been, taking unwonted interest in the beautiful children, and tending them with the most loving care. She petted them almost as much as a mother. Pale as

her young face was, and waning as she could not fail to know her strength to be, she yet insisted on carrying about the growing boys in her arms, one taking his turn after the other. Or she steadied their little steps with all a mother's gentle and affectionate watchfulness, when they first betrayed symptoms of a tendency to walking, holding on by the chairs, and essaying a few feet across a figure of the soft carpet. Few could have confessed more love for children than did she for these. Her nature itself seemed more like a child's than that of a mature person. There was so much gentleness in her manner, and such innocence in her look, and so much guilelessness in her speech. Never was there so much as a flush of hasty feeling on her cheek. Never were her thoughtful eyes seen to light with anger. She was altogether kind, and loving, and simple souled. Like a meek and humble saint, her sincere faith seemed to have folded its hands in quiet submission to the will of her heavenly Father. And for other things than her affection for the children alone was she deeply beloved at the little parsonage.

But dark days come. There is no putting them off always. The curtain must at some time be let down, bringing gloom between our own eyes and the eyes of those we love.

And the dark days were over Ingleside. The clouds were fast blotting out the sun. The gloom was entering in at the windows.

Early spring it was again, and the dampness of the

season had effected its destroying inroad in more family circles than one. The parsonage was not passed by.

Ellen had been at play with the children nearly the whole of one day, till she had, in truth, well nigh tired herself out. Late in the afternoon she had carried them out into the yard, to amuse them with looking at the trees and the budding shrubbery. Little did she, at the time, think that she was greatly hazarding their precious lives and her own. Little could she have foreseen the wretchedness that would result from her momentary want of thought.

That very night they were seized — both children — with a most violent cold. Their parents became immediately anxious for them, nursing them during the entire night.

The next day the matter was no better. The colds seemed to have increased, fastening themselves upon the innocent victims with a gripe that was unwilling to loose itself. Though the case was the cause of much anxiety, still they thought it was nothing more than what their own care and watchfulness could master. Ellen was every hour near them, suffering acutely from her accusing thoughts.

Late in the afternoon of that day Dr. Jennings was asked to step in. He did so, and pronounced it as his opinion that the distemper might easily be broken up in a night; and he expressed the hope that he would find them bright and active when he should call again in the morning.

Their eyes were dull and swollen. There was no joyous or vivacious expression in their infant faces. The smiles were all strangled by the griping hand of temporary suffering.

The evening lamp was shaded to their vision, in the little nursery, making the room look sad and sombre; and to this look the expressions of the countenances there greatly added. Father and mother seemed oppressed indeed. They were not, to appearances, very deeply alarmed; yet they were sorely anxious. It was not deemed necessary to call in the services of watchers, as they felt themselves abundantly able to minister to all their little wants themselves.

Late in the evening it was when Mr. Humphreys went home with poor Ellen — she insisting on sitting up with the children through the night, but they utterly refusing to hear to any thing of the kind. She went out through the door with tears streaming from her eyes.

“Do you think they will be better by morning?” she asked in a whisper of Mrs. Humphreys.

“O, dear Ellen,” said she, folding her affectionately to her breast, “I hope so. Do not be so anxious. Try and get calm again. God will never put upon us more than we are able to bear.”

Ellen went away — but O, how sadly!

She sought her chamber, and knelt down to ask forgiveness for the great wrong she felt she had done. Her pillow was wet with tears when she fell asleep; and even

after that, her sobs could be heard, at short intervals, for some time, over the room.

They retired late at the parsonage, leaving the nursery lamp burning, as usual, in the corner. It was their anxious hope that the prescriptions of kind and skilful Dr. Jennings might be effective in throwing off the severe pressure on their lungs, and speedily restore their delicate systems to comfort and health again.

It was only after long watchfulness that sleep finally came to their pillows. Nature had been overtasked and sadly strained. She needed rest.

A strange noise — slight at first, but repeated regularly, and increasing in its volume — awakened the mother. Her ear is always quicker to catch these slight alarms than that of any other.

Immediately she sprang from her bed, and carried the lamp to the little crib in which the infants lay.

“What is the matter?” asked Mr. Humphreys, alarmed at being wakened so suddenly.

“I don’t know. I cannot tell. Poor Arthur! poor boy!”

This was all her answer, as she took the child in her arms and tried to bring it instant relief. The little one’s sufferings were acute and terrible.

“The croup, William! — *the croup!*” she exclaimed.

Such wheezing and coughing, from the choked throat of the young sufferer, were pitiful to listen to. At one moment it seemed as if it could not, by any possibility, draw another

breath ; and, in the next, it would be convulsed with a terrible fit of choking and coughing that made the hearts of the poor parents quake with fear.

The tears were streaming down Carrie's checks. This was one of the terrible trials she had ever tried to be prepared for, but to which few natures, in the time of their coming, are altogether equal. Poor Carrie ! who is there that, in this trying moment, does not pity you ?

The efforts and struggles of the child to obtain breath were beyond all powers of description. Its face would turn perfectly black from suffocation. Its breathing could be heard any where in the room. The other one, that still lay in the crib, was badly choked ; but its danger did not seem by any means so imminent as little Arthur's. Mr. Humphreys hurried desperately to get to the doctor's and bring assistance. He went out of the door in a run. The sound of the door smote heavily on the young mother's heart. She exerted herself in every possible way to get relief for her infant, giving it one potion after another — but all in vain. All in vain ! how these words will ring in the ears of those who have been themselves called to go through just such scenes !

When the father came back he was alone, Doctor Jennings promising to run over as speedily as he could dress himself and lay his hand on his medicines. He was greatly at loss for breath, having run every step of the way. The moment he opened the door of the nursery he saw Carrie holding a child still in her arms.

"How is he? any easier?" were his first questions as he stepped quickly beside her to look at the little one's face.

In a moment he saw that she held Alfred, the other one.

"Arthur!" he exclaimed in a whisper of fear, — "where is *he*? Let me take him."

She pointed to the bed, her tears pouring from her eyes, and her lips trembling and quivering with her terrible emotion. It seemed as if her frame were convulsed to its very centre.

The father looked on the bed. There lay the infant, but he lay perfectly still. He had ceased his struggles for breath now. His gentle and sunny spirit had been released.

He took him up. Rigid already! Lifeless — colorless — silent in death!

O, did he ever thus feel the surging wave of agony roll over his drowning heart before?

The doctor, at that moment, came in. He was struck dumb with what he saw. The tears started instantly to his eyes — he who had been so many years accustomed to scenes of anguish and misery!

Could any help be got for the one that survived? That was the only hope left now.

"Doctor, save my other child!"

It was an earnest prayer, and given in a voice broken with deepest emotion.

The kind physician would do what his skill could. None could do more. To promise more were, in that hour, a fearful mockery.

The respiration became more and more difficult. Sirups were freely employed, medicines properly given; even extreme measures for immediate relief were resorted to. Still the breath came quicker and quicker, and shorter and shorter. The air passages choked. The convulsions attendant on suffocation began to set in. The doctor himself became at once alarmed, and bodingly shook his head.

Alas! alas! I can only chronicle it all. I cannot describe a scene so heartrending.

In the arms of Dr. Jennings himself, the other babe suddenly ceased breathing.

There seemed to be no help for this great double affliction. It came upon that devoted house, at the dead of night, like a swift thunderbolt. There was no evading it or thrusting it away. There was no hoping it might, for even a brief time, be delayed for a later and greater sorrow.

The doctor was quite overcome. He wept with those who wept, giving them freely of his deepest and closest sympathies.

"Let us pray!" solemnly called Mr. Humphreys; and all knelt down together.

From that house of mourning, where only dark clouds and gloomy shadows were brooding thickly,—where sobs

and sorrowing filled the very atmosphere of the apartments, — went up to Heaven, on that night of distress, a prayer for mercy, and strength, and compassion, and grace, that would have melted a heart of stone. The father supplicated for help to bear up under so great a burden of grief. He asked for a new kindling of faith in their hearts, that they might look upon this great trouble as only the means of drawing them closer to God. He craved the continuance of his Father's abiding love for them, that sorrow might never dim their sight so that they should wander in the least degree from the straight path. Such a prayer had never so gone from his heart and lips before. It seemed a shining of the clear light up through the wall of darkness, and its steady flame illuminated the place. If religion *meant* any thing, its abounding consolations would offer themselves now. And those consolations, at this time, were precious indeed.

When Ellen Walters reached Ingleside in the morning, — which she did at the earliest possible hour, — she was as yet ignorant of the fate of her darling favorites. She entered the nursery, and saw the mother sitting near the bed.

"Ellen," sweetly and softly said the stricken mother, taking the girl's hand, "only be calm. God is good to us all alike. He sends us nothing except in mercy and love. There are your dear pets. How sweetly they sleep, dear Ellen!" And the tears came again into her eyes.

Ellen looked at the twins. It was almost impossible to

convince her that they were dead. She could hardly believe even what she saw. She was frantic with grief when, at length, the truth was laid bare to her in all its open reality. All their words of persuasion were insufficient to soothe and compose her. She threw herself on the bed, and wept as if her very heart would break.

Let me pass it all over. It moves me sadly enough, as the sombre memory drifts across my brain again.

That sunny day in spring, when the church doors were thrown wide open, and the sympathizing people flocked in, when the coffin that contained the precious ashes of both the infants lay across the table at the altar rail,—when the singing of the choir was so touchingly plaintive, and the voice of the stricken father was hushed in silence, and the sobs of men and women were audible all over the house,—how can this ever be forgotten, one single side of the whole of the saddening picture?

That long, dark, and sober procession from the church to the village churchyard, threading its slow way along the street, the bright sun shining on old men and young girls, on faces with wrinkles and faces like fresh roses,—how shall so impressive a sight ever sink down and be lost in the hiding-places of memory?

The sad singing of the hymn at the grave, more like a low wail of distress than like song,—the solemn voice of the pastor brother who officiated,—the last look of the

children down into the dark grave, that had thus swallowed up so many cherished hopes, — the slow turning away of the bereaved parents from the place, their hearts swelling almost to bursting with grief, — what pen can carry to the most sympathetic reader even a tithe of the melancholy meaning of it all?

The mourners returned home — to the home that seemed now deserted. The stricken hearts sought their own chamber. Their grief was too sacred for intrusion. None could share it. No other heart could take a portion of it on itself, and so lighten the weary ones of their fearful load.

Carrie threw her head on her beloved husband's bosom, and gave up to the tempest of her distress.

It was long before she could be calm again. No words, even from her husband's lips, availed with her now. He was stricken, too; but *she* was the *mother*. Are there not mothers every where who will know the difference in the grief?

He sat in silence at the window, looking sadly out over the yard. Never did earth seem so desolate to him as now. The place he had centred his affections upon was altogether deserted.

And twilight gathered while these two mourners sat alone. They were silent and thoughtful. Their lips seemed sealed, even as the sepulchre of their love for their children had that day been sealed for a lifetime to each.

I can only repeat a sweet and sad stanza from the poet while I recall this scene, and they shall be left with the kind reader's heartiest sympathies : —

“ Only with *silence* as their benediction
God's angels come,
When, in the shadow of a great affliction,
The soul sits dumb.”

CHAPTER XIX.

ZACK, THE CRIPPLE.

AMONG the other notabilities and characters, great and small, in our parish, the humblest may, perhaps, — and why not? — possess as much interest for the reader as those at the end of the other extreme.

There was one character that interested every body, not more strangers in the village than those who had had opportunities of knowing him for years. His name was Zack Wheaton, and he was a cripple.

He tenanted a small box of a red house, only a single story high, a little distance off the village street, where two maiden sisters attended to the housekeeping, and he to the farming and general out-of-door business. One might smile at the thought of a cripple's being really a farmer; but cripple as old Zack Wheaton was, *he* was a farmer in spite of it. And people said that, for *him*, he was an excellent one, too.

The spot of ground he improved, it is true, was but limited, scarce amounting to two good, fair acres; yet he

had a knack of getting more off of that little tract than some men take annually from acres four times as many. He was a person of untiring perseverance and industry. He never accomplished a great deal in any one day, but, as people have a habit of saying, he kept pecking. Now, as it is the constant dripping of the drops that wears the rock, so it was the steady pecking of old Zack Wheaton that overcame his difficulties.

He walked on his knees, having no sign of a foot to put in use. Below his knees his limbs were wanting. "Blessed leetle I have to spend for shoe leather," he had a habit of saying, when he was in one of his joking moods. So on his two stumps he went picking his way about, supporting himself by two little standards the boys used to call "saw-horses," so much did they resemble those articles so serviceable to the practical carpenter.

On his two-acre farm he raised every variety of vegetable, plant, and herb it is possible for a thoughtful housewife to stand in need of. Beans, and squashes, and melons; cabbages, and beets, and onions; beds of herbs for drinks and medicines,—these, and innumerable other tempting exhibitions, he kept just behind and beside his low-roofed mansion; and he stumped out to show you his treasures willingly, making two round indentures in the soft dirt as he went, occasionally turning about to study your countenance like some little dwarf far below you.

In addition to the raising of vegetables and seeds, he improved a corner of his field as a nursery; and there he had

patiently cultivated tender twigs of trees till they became strong and able to endure transplanting. This part of his labor was his especial delight ; and he doubtless spent more time over it than over any other. The farmers and the villagers always helped old Zack along a little by the purchase of a few young trees each spring and fall when he brought them down the street in that unique little tilt cart of his ; and he dropped his silver, with a gladdened look, into the leathern pouch to which he confided his several collections, thanking his patrons always with a merry twinkle of his bright old eyes. Ah, Zack, there are few better practical philosophers nowadays than were you in your day, taking sunshine and rain alike pretty much as they came, thankful that your heart was large enough to enjoy all it did !

Mr. Humphreys occasionally called there, having done so for the first time when he was hunting up a few new varieties of cherry and plum trees for the parsonage garden. He liked the appearance of the little cripple much ; and he liked his sound philosophy still more. Added to other reasons, this certainly was one why he was attracted strongly there. The two maiden sisters attended meeting pretty regularly, too ; and when their brother well could, on fine days for instance, he came along after them in his curious vehicle.

The sisters were named Hitty and Suke. Hitty was the elder, though their brother was the eldest of all. They were as totally unlike as it is possible for any two sisters

to be. Hitty had gray eyes, and very light hair, that was now getting streaked somewhat with the silver. Her forehead was very high for a woman's ; and it had innumerable fine wrinkles, like the small plaits in a shirt frill. And when she laughed she showed just four extremely long, white teeth, that made you think she might sometimes eat her meat raw. Yet I believe she was perfectly harmless, at least so far as her *teeth* went : it was her *tongue* that was reckoned, by those who knew, the sharper weapon.

Suke — every body called her Suke, even to her brother and sister — was quite the antipodes of Hitty. She was as silent as she could be all the time. Some people, who had been at the house frequently enough to form an opinion, thought she really might be dumb ; yet she was always ready with her ejaculatory “Humph !” whenever her sister Hitty made a remark that did not happen exactly to suit her ; and the promptness with which it was given proved that she was not deaf, even if she were dumb. Put them both together, and the sisters made still a new and third picture by the simple force of contrast.

Mr. Humphreys was over there one afternoon, about three months after the loss of his dear children, and met old Zack stumping round with his little sawhorses just in the road.

“Good day, good day, Mister Humphreys !” called out the remnant of the man, looking up almost perpendicularly into the clergyman's face. “I'm glad to see ye over here amongst us agin. I'm really glad to see ye !”

Mr. Humphreys advanced and accosted him with corresponding cordiality, asking after his health and that of his sisters. He did not offer to shake hands with him, for that would have been a quite impracticable matter, under the circumstances.

"Yes, our folks are all well," said Zack. "Won't you walk in and see 'em? They'll be glad to see you agin arter all your late trouble, Mr. Humphreys. They've got as large pitty as other folks; only they are nothing but *poor* people: that's all the difference, you see."

As the little cripple hobbled along to carry out what he seemed to consider the becoming ceremony of opening the door for his guest, he formed as quaint and grotesque a picture as it is possible for the human mind to conceive. He wore a peajacket about the short trunk of his body, that, on *him*, looked rather like a greatcoat — covering him up entirely. The two side pockets were in lieu of other convenient receptacles of his work tools; and Mr. Humphreys could detect in them, as his ambling gait caused them alternately to gape wide open, now the handle of a hammer, now a pair of pincers; here a gimlet, and there a handful of nails and a snarled bunch of twine.

Hitty met them just at the door, and greeted the minister with a hearty shake of her shrivelled hand, while she likewise threw her forehead into a hundred minute wrinkles, and exhibited her long, tusk-like front teeth.

"Come in," said she, stepping briskly before him. "Take a seat, and set down!" — and she dusted a chair

bottom with her thin, faded apron. "I *ain't* in very good order here to-day ; but no matter. That ain't what you come to see, mabbe. There's Suke ! Suke, why don't you speak ?"

Mr. Humphreys saluted the other and more sullen sister, who stood spinning out a lengthening thread at the wheel. She had stopped the drone of her instrument on his entrance ; and there she still stood, holding on by one of the long spokes of the wheel with one hand, pinching her thread between the finger and thumb of her other, and staring with all the intensity her mild blue eyes could express. She only replied to Mr. Humphreys' salutation, —

"How do ?"

Zack was right behind his guest, and squatted himself on a very low chair, with arms and a cushion, the moment he got in. If Suke was willing that the conversation should lag, *he* was not.

"Don't you want some young trees to-day ?" he inquired, pitching his voice high and shrill. "I guess I've got what you want in my grounds."

"*Don't* Zack !" said Hitty. "'Taint perlite, so soon arter a person gits into the house ; and the *minister*, too !"

"I didn't think of taking any thing *to-day*," answered Mr. Humphreys ; "but I will look over your nursery with you presently, if you please."

"Certainly ; yes ; it does me as much good to walk about in my little patch o' trees as it ever did a live lord to strut over his big forests. I've read o' sich things, you see, in

my day, — though my old eyes don't let me read a great deal nowadays, — and I think on 'em when I'm all alone."

"It is a blessed thing to be contented, Mr. Wheaton," remarked Mr. Humphreys; and he was going to enlarge upon his remark, when he was interrupted by Hitty with one of her hollow laughs, —

"Ha! ha! he!" she began; "*Mr.* Wheaton! Nobody in all the world ever called him any thing but Zack, and *old* Zack; and here the minister is a misterin' of him! Well done, Zack!"

Suke smiled, and folded her hands in her lap as she sat down. It was a very faint smile, however, like that of the sick sun in a day in midwinter.

"Wal, *wal!*" exclaimed the cripple, good naturedly, "what *of* it? I s'pose I'm most *old* enough to be called by a title! If I wasn't, what would they call me *old* Zack for? But that's no matter *now*. Mr. Humphreys was a-tellin' of a body's bein' contented, and so; and he says it's a blessed thing. So *I* think, too. *I* try to be as contented here as I can. I know there's room enough in the house here for me, for I'm sure I shouldn't want a *bigger* house to travel round in; and my little garding's big enough for jest the same reason. So I feel settled down all the while. I couldn't be oneasy if I would. And besides, I don't see the use in't."

The clergyman went on to speak of the virtues contentment bred in the heart; making people charitable, because it enabled them first of all to possess their souls in peace;

and shedding a bright halo about the circle of the most humble and limited life, because the real proportions of one's character were in such an atmosphere best developed. "Yet," said he, "there is but one feeling in the world that can produce this contented feeling."

"And I'd like to have you tell me what *that* is," said Zack.

"The conviction that your heart is at peace with God."

The little man sank down still farther in his chair, and cast his eyes thoughtfully on the floor.

Hitty began toying with her apron, and looked at the floor likewise. She could be thoughtful at times, even if she were so voluble with her tongue.

"Unless a person's *heart* is right," added Mr. Humphreys, "how can any thing be right? If the great wheel is still, how can the other little wheels move?"

"Yes — yes," whispered Hitty, apparently to herself, as she still kept her gaze on the floor, and her figure rocking backward and forward.

"Many people imagine religion to be a gloomy thing; but *true* religion is not. Hypocrisy undoubtedly is. But the heart that leans on God alone, in every joy and every trial this world has to offer, is a heart bathed in the sunshine of God's smiles. If he chastises even, it is only to produce more happiness eventually. Perhaps the heart may be wandering away, and the stripes are necessary to bring it back again. It is all for its best good in the end.

I have been chastised ; but I can say it has done my heart great good, for it is carried nearer than ever to God."

"So you have — so you have !" pitifully exclaimed the cripple. "I don't think but a person that's reconciled to what *you've* suffered has got the true religion."

"Well, and from this religious trust alone can spring contentment. Nothing else begets it. We may *say* we are contented and happy ; but let a greater trial than we have ever yet known drive its cruel wave over our hearts, and we shall then know if we have the true feeling. That is the surest test for us, after all."

"I said *I* was contented and happy," returned Zaek, hitching in his chair. "I really thought I was. But I don't think so now."

"Why not ?" asked Mr. Humphreys.

"Jest because I hav'n't got this *faith* you talk so good about. I'm afraid, if I should lose what little I've scraped together, I should be any thing but a happy man."

"*That's* what you would !" exclaimed his sister Hitty.

"Umph !" exclaimed the other sister, folding her hands over again.

"Then this is your truest test," observed Mr. Humphreys. "You know the Bible says, 'Except you leave houses, lands, &c.,' — you remember the passage ?"

"Sartain, sartain," answered he.

"Yis, I *guess* he does," added Hitty ; "for he always reads his Bible all day Sunday. He'd *orter* know if there *is* such a passage there."

“Umph!” said Suke; and this time she crossed her hands.

“Now examine your heart by this rule, each one of you,” said Mr Humphreys. “If you can willingly obey the injunction without a lisp of murmuring or complaining, be sure you have the true feeling; and it is worth more than all the gold, and silver, and precious stones that men toil for early and late, for it brings exactly what they think these earthly riches can buy.”

For an hour the subject, with correlative topics, was talked upon by them. Zack received quite new views of life and of happiness, good as he was in the habit of regarding his old ones. If he had held Mr. Humphreys in high esteem before, that habit of esteem was greatly strengthened now. He was free to confess—and he did take occasion to do so ever after—that no minister they had ever had in Brookboro’ was equal, in any respect, to Mr. Humphreys. He had a way of saying that “he believed in him all the way through.”

After he had sat thus long in conversation with the humble inmates of the house, Mr. Humphreys proposed a walk over the grounds.

“Over my little farm, sir,” said Zack. “Yes, yes, by all means. Your eye, mabbe, can take it all in at a single quick look; but you’ll find ’taint none the less pleasant for all that. Come, let me show ye round!”

So round through the narrow paths the little cripple went, his loose jacket swinging lithely and yon as he

walked, and diselosing the entire contents of both its pockets. First he pointed out the rows of vegetables. There were many varieties, and a plenty of every variety. Beets and carrots, squashes and turnips, they crowded together thickly on the well-trained soil. And there were long beds of onions, from which he told Mr. Humphreys he reckoned he should get — I cannot now remember how many bushels of nice white onions, good as gold to him in the market. And such an army of bean poles, all inwreathed like so many ancient thyrsi with the bearing vines, the long green and tinted pods hanging down in abundant clusters from the bottom to the top! And rows of pea vines, once bearing finely; but soon to be pulled up, and their spaces supplied with turnips. And cabbages, spreading wide their great broad leaves, full of wrinkles and puckers, where the dew was always gathered in the early morning.

But his pride centred chiefly in his little coppice of fruit trees; younglings all of them, that had felt the tenderness of his hand since their first pale sprouts had parted the soil. He seemed almost to know each one of them; and went round among them with a very familiar manner, as if he were going to call off their names one by one. It was exceedingly new to observe the *affection* he had for his miniature nursery.

Mr. Humphreys expressed himself entirely delighted with what he saw; and when he came to take his leave, he could not help dropping the remark, that, poor as they might be in the matter of worldly goods, they were yet richer, far richer, than many whose possessions a hun-

dred times outmeasured theirs. He seemed to appreciate deeply the feeling that always brooded over this little spot, and could compare it with no other that was discoverable in places less humble than this.

Frequently came he over to see the Wheatons, sometimes bringing Carrie with him. There was always enough to interest, and generally something to amuse, them there. The habits of the maiden sisters were a complete study of themselves; and the original ways and quaint philosophy of the little crippled brother were attractions capable of drawing any one, if all others had been wanting.

Summer and winter, old Zack Wheaton toddled about his place as happy as the happiest. If his sisters were ever cross, he was so much the merrier. If they scolded, he sang. When things went wrong a little, he said *he* could put them right again; and sometimes made them farther out of the way than ever by trying to better matters he did not quite understand. To plant and to sow, to spade and to hoe, to harvest and carry to market, to braid mats and make baskets, — all the while whistling, and singing, and laughing aloud, — this was the happy life of little Zack Wheaton. His heart was a barometer for all who came near its influence. When he first drove up the street with his early trees and shrubs, every one was satisfied that spring had come; for Zack Wheaton never took up *his* plants till the heart of winter was broke and the brooks were swimming down through the meadows.

Happy cripple! How few with sound bodies have as sound hearts as thou!

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONSUMPTIVE.

ELLEN WALTERS was but a frail child at best. Her figure was very slight, and her face very pale. She was almost too delicate for earth, in heart as well as body.

The troubles begotten of the death of the twins she had petted so fondly wore on her spirits continually. It was easy to see that she was broken down from the day she beheld them in death's embrace. She had never recovered in the least from the depth of grief into which that harrowing sight had plunged her.

Carrie was with her much, oftentimes sending over for her to come and remain for days together at Ingleside. But the child always felt distressed about coming. She could not bear to go about in the same rooms again where she had played so many times with the twins. She could not stand for a moment in the apartment where they died without breaking out in tears. It gave her extreme pain to see lying round the little playthings — shells, and rattles, and whistles — that had helped amuse them when alive.

They seemed to know her face. They smiled upon her. They were a true and deep gladness to her heart. And now they were gone — gone out of her earthly sight forever!

She never ceased to reproach herself for the imprudence of which she was guilty with them, and by which imprudence she felt that their precious lives were sacrificed. Her spirit bowed then, and her heart broke. Carrie saw the trouble, and felt how dark and gloomy it was as it cast its big shadow across the pathway of her young life; and her efforts were constant to relieve her of her destroying oppression. She sat and talked with her for hours together, trying to lighten her spirits. She conversed on other subjects till she found it was much better to touch on the very one that should have been proscribed altogether.

The darling infants were in the child's mind, and on her tongue, continually. She could do nothing but think of them. She could hardly do any more than talk of them all the time.

Her health gradually grew still more delicate each month of the dying year; and when winter finally set in, heralded with the hoarse trumpets of the winds that brayed defiance over the whole face of the earth, and when the days grew shorter, and the nights long and silent, she was but the relief of her former self, shadowy and frail as that former self was. She grew sadder and sadder every day, just as the sun grew fainter and fainter. She watched its shadows on her carpet, and felt that her own life was thus fading

away. She could not sew, she could not read. Few came to sit with her, for she was a half myth in her nature to them all: yet she had their full sympathies, though it might be unknown to her.

It was near the close of the year when Mrs. Humphreys happened to be sitting with her in her little chamber,—for she was confined to that closely now,—and they were talking of sickness and death with each other. Ellen had said that she felt as if she should never be any better.

“It is the very worst thing for you,” returned Mrs. Humphreys, “to *think* so. The best and first step to health is good spirits. Try to look up a little, dear Ellen. This downcast mood will be worse than all else for you.”

Still she could not rally her.

“My feelings tell me,” said Ellen, “what my looks do not confess to another. I do not believe I shall ever see another winter in this world, Mrs. Humphreys.”

So direct an avowal startled the sympathizing wife, and for a moment she said nothing in reply.

“I think all the time of the dear children,” said the girl, the tears in her eyes. “How can I help it?”

“Does it not make you happy, Ellen, to know that they are resting in the arms of their Savior?”

“O, yes; yes, indeed. But how can I help regretting that their sweet lives were so brief? I accuse myself, Mrs. Humphreys; you can never know *how* much!”

“*That* does no good, dear Ellen. You should not give up to such feelings. Every thing has been ordered just

as it is. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father's notice; and even the hairs of our head are numbered. God's love shines out through all, dear child. I can think of my babes now as being in the everlasting sunshine and radiance of God's smile. The thought brings me constant joy. I look forward to the time when I shall join them again, never to have them torn from the embrace of my love by death. You loved them, too, Ellen."

"O, how *much* I loved them!"

"Then you will meet them again, even as you hope to see and know your own dear mother, who has gone before. We shall all know and love our friends in heaven. It is a blessed reflection."

Ellen was weeping.

"If your heart is really a partaker of the peace Jesus promises to those who believe, and truly believe," continued Mrs. Humphreys, "you will see no cause for lamentation or complaint in any single ordering of events. Your heart will be at peace."

Thereupon Mrs. Humphreys rose and took the Bible that lay on the stand, and, opening it, read aloud to Ellen from various parts of the New Testament. It was from Revelation, especially, that she liked to read; the pictures of the new life were so vividly drawn, portraying the beauty and splendor of the Jerusalem that is to be, with its golden streets, and its gates and walls of crystal, and with its clear river running through the streets, and raising to her imagination scenes, such as are not in all the gal-

leries that earth can boast, of green pastures and limpid brooks, of white and innocent flocks reclining peacefully by the streams, the kind Shepherd walking among them and dispensing his smiles, — these were the pictures that fixed the soul of the frail girl, and she tried to take them into her heart as realities already.

It was an uncommonly cold and gloomy day without, and it is not improbable that the appearance of things out of doors may have had its influence on Ellen's spirits. But when her kind friend rose to go she had greatly changed, and the load had been much lightened.

Mrs. Humphreys met Ellen's father below stairs, just as she was passing out through the entry.

"How do you think she is, to-day, Mrs. Humphreys?" he anxiously asked her.

She was his only child, and he loved her tenderly as a father could.

"I think she is very feeble," Mrs. Humphreys felt obliged to answer him.

The father shook his head.

"Poor child!" he uttered in a whisper.

"The day seems to have had some effect on her spirits; but I have tried to help her throw off all that. I have been sitting and talking and reading to her for some time. I think she was much calmer in her feelings when I took my leave."

"Ah, Mrs. Humphreys," said he, his eyes filling with water, "I cannot thank you enough for your goodness.

I've seen a great deal of trouble for *one* heart. Perhaps there's more just at hand. Sometimes I think it must be so, and my heart almost misgives me."

"Whatever is put upon our shoulders, Mr. Walters, God intends that we should bear. He has a design in all things. If afflictions come, let us only pray that we may improve by their sad teachings. Our life here is soon over; we shall be united in another world."

And, with her heart too full to utter another word, she opened the door and went out, leaving the father standing alone.

Immediately he went up to Ellen's room, and sat down and remained with her for a long time. This he was in the habit of doing every day, fearing for her feeling lonely and dispirited. He was an affectionate man, and had a true and womanly heart beneath his none too refined exterior; and he would gladly have endured any earthly trial or suffering himself rather than see his only child in her present condition. But that was not for him to choose. His part was to bear in silence and submission.

Every day almost Mrs. Humphreys was at the side of her dear young friend, except on such days as when the inclemency of the weather prevented. But Mr. Humphreys was there constantly, rain or shine. He loved much to talk with her of God and heaven. He loved to have her give up all the wealth of her deep feelings to him with the simplicity that betokens childhood — her temper seemed so sweet, and all her commonest thoughts so free from guile.

Daily her symptoms became worse, save when, now and then, a fresh dawning of hope revived in her breast in the morning, only to deceive her cruelly in the evening. Ah, there is no disease that so deeply wears its way into the very heart itself as the deceitful disease of consumption. Its victim is, one day, so much improved in all her appearances, and the color plays so daintily about the cheeks, and the eyes swim in the brilliancy of a new life; and the next, or even by the nightfall, every buoyant hope is gone, every trace of revived spirits is hidden, the disease is clutching steadily at the weary heart again, and the poor, patient, deluded victim falls back into the dismal slough of despondency once more. There are no diseases that so challenge the whole sympathy of beholders, even if they be not friends.

Late in January it was when Mrs. Humphreys had another conversation with the child, which clung tenaciously to her memory. Ellen was talking of dying again. The subject seemed all the time in her mind.

She had grown paler and thinner than ever. Her eyes were very large, and so lighted with a strange expression that even Carrie shuddered to look steadily into them. And her long, dark eyelashes swept her cheek, setting off the expression with a something akin to ghastliness.

Ellen sat, bolstered in a great arm chair, looking but the ghost of her former self, her countenance melancholy in the extreme, and her feelings evidently much exercised with the subject that was uppermost in her mind. Mrs. Humphreys asked how she was that afternoon.

"I don't know," she answered, plaintively. "I don't think I'm any better, Mrs. Humphreys."

Carrie sat down beside her and held her hand.

"Sometimes I think I shall be called away before you will come again; and then I try to feel what your sorrow would be, to come and find me gone, and you had spoken no last words to me. O Mrs. Humphreys! I think so much about the little boys, too. I *know* I shall see them soon now. Something tells me it will not be long."

"Ellen — dear Ellen," said her good friend, "do you feel at all afraid to die?"

"No — no, Mrs. Humphreys. I am all ready, waiting the Lord's own good time. He will put me beyond the reach of these daily trials, that tear my poor heart so."

"Do you believe that Christ has come into your heart, Ellen, and taken possession there? Have you any *doubts*, when you think of it all seriously?"

"Mrs. Humphreys, I think I feel as if Christ were truly mine. It makes me so happy, the thought of it."

"Should you be as ready to live as you now feel to die, if it were God's good will to spare you to us yet a little while longer? Should you feel no impatience that the thread that held you to life was not sooner cut asunder?"

"I hope not. I try to feel reconciled to whatever may come, Mrs. Humphreys."

"Then your heart is at peace. But if there is the least murmuring or repining, be sure that something is wrong; something then needs immediate correction."

"Jesus is very dear to me," faintly returned the girl. "I love him as my only friend. He will be my stay and comforter. I feel that I have given all up to him."

There was a pause.

"The ground will be hard when they dig my grave," said she again. "The white snow will drift about my sleeping-place, so that you will not know where I lie. It will be heaped up against my headstone. I shall lie, all alone, in the old yard, with only dear mother near me. Shall you have to walk through the deep snows to my funeral? Will they have to dig paths for them to get to my grave?"

Carrie could not answer her, but pressed her hand in silence.

"Don't feel sad when I am gone," she continued. "I shall be with little Alfred and Arthur, and love them more than ever. They are good angels now. Shall I be good enough to become an angel, Mrs. Humphreys?"

"If you give yourself all to your Savior," answered she, weeping.

"Don't cry for me," begged Ellen; "*I wish* you wouldn't, my dear Mrs. Humphreys. I am so happy now, and you so wretched. I hope you will not forget me when I am gone; but I do not wish you to cry so for me. I shall be happier in heaven than I can be here. And you will come over and sit by my grave, in the little burying yard, when you go to train the roses on the graves of dear Alfred and Arthur. Will you plant one white rose

at the head of *my* grave, good Mrs. Humphreys? — a *white* one? It will always make you think of the girl that loved you so much when she was alive. The graveyard is not such a very lonely place, Mrs. Humphreys.”

When Carrie reached home she narrated to Mr. Humphreys all that had passed between her and the dying girl. It was her earnest desire that the child be gratified in every little earthly wish that remained. And thereafter Mr. Humphreys paid longer visits at the house of Mr. Walters, conversing with the failing one as long as she could bear it safely, and gently smoothing for her the path down to the grave by his pious and affectionate consolations.

He and Carrie both went over one day. It was in the latter part of winter, and the air full of falling snow. They staid from early in the forenoon until late in the afternoon. Mr. Walters was close at hand, his stricken heart bleeding. He was much to be pitied, indeed. Vacantly he walked all about the house, as if he were lost in his own home. Every room seemed to him to be banked with gloom.

Ellen was on the bed now, propped up in a half-sitting posture with pillows. O, how weak! how pale! how shadowy! The lamp must be fast going out.

Her friends saw it; they had tried to avert the reality, to put it off, as long as they could; they had prayed and watched with her, beseeching for a gift of new strength,

and anxiously looking to see if the gift could be hers. But the hour seemed finally drawing nigh.

Her father could not bear to be in the room long at a time ; his feelings rose to such a pitch of turbulent grief that he was totally unable to control them. He would step across the floor to the foot of her bed, gaze into her dying face a few moments, look round upon the others with an expression of indescribable anguish, and suddenly go out again.

"Father," said she, when, on one of these times, he had placed himself opposite her, "will you come and hold my hand?"

He obeyed her call as if he had been the merest child.

"*Dear father,*" she said, "I shall be with you but a short time now. I am going home. I shall see mother again. Don't weep for me, father, after I am gone. I shall be happy."

The tears already streamed from his eyes.

"I can't bear to lose you, Ellen," said he, in a broken and trembling voice. "It almost kills me to think of it."

"But we must all die, at some time or other," she replied.

"I know it, dear Ellen ; I know it. But ——"

"Then why not be reconciled to God's good pleasure in the matter? He gave us life ; he certainly has a right to take it when he chooses. If he calls for me now, father, ought I to be backward in obeying his call?"

"No — no, my child. You are right ; you are always

right." And he smoothed down the thin hair on the side of her head next him, petting her with his hand.

"And if *I* am ready to go, father, ought not *you* to be ready to have me?"

He answered nothing; his emotions choked his utterance.

"I wish you would feel as ready to die, father, as I am, this moment. O, why *will* you not give your heart to your Savior? *Dear* father, you are the last one left; shall you not meet us all at last? Shall *you* be left out of our circle in heaven? Say that you will set every thing in readiness for your departure. Do not put off this great work till it is too late. Do promise that you will set your house in order, dear father, and be ready when the call comes. It may come suddenly. I shall die so much happier — O, *so much* happier!"

He bowed his head and dropped to his knees; his heart was melted.

Mr. Humphreys knelt down beside him in that sick room and offered a prayer to Heaven. He besought that that day might be a memorable day for all, especially for the father; that his heart might be entirely given up to God, without a protest, even unspoken; that the other heart, now so near home, might be received into its Father's house, where were many mansions prepared for those who did his will. His solemn tones rang over the whole house, through the chambers and the entries. It was, in truth, for that day, a house of prayer.

Carrie sat down near Ellen, on the side opposite her father, and held her other hand, bathing it with her tears.

"O my Savior!" sweetly exclaimed the child, rolling up her eyes in an ecstatic frenzy of feeling. "Come, Jesus! come quickly! Take me to thy bosom!"

"Almost home," said Mrs. Humphreys, in a low voice; "almost home, dear child."

"Yes — yes, I see the blessed heaven. Come, my Savior! Come, Lord — come quickly! O my dear father! make your peace with God. Jesus stands waiting for you with open arms. We shall all meet again in heaven."

"Yes — in heaven," repeated Mr. Humphreys.

"Little Alfred and Arthur! and dear mother, too!" added the exhausted and rapidly-sinking girl. "O, we shall never be separated again."

"No more death," said Mr. Humphreys, "no more tears — no more parting. Blessed be Jesus for his dear promises to us all."

"Yes, blessed — blessed Jesus!" she repeated. "*Dear* father, do give yourself to God. It will make me die so happy. I shall know then that you will meet us again. Only tell me, before I die, that you will give up your heart — all your heart. *Dear* father, before I die! I cannot stay long. My breath is so hard!"

The father wept as a child. He was perfectly unmanned. This was the sinking away of his last hope and stay. Henceforth his way in the world would be alone.

"Yes — yes, my child," he cried. "I do — I do."

"*All*, father? your *whole* heart?" asked the dying girl, her pale face lighting with an expression still more heavenly.

"Dear Ellen, I hope I may live the rest of my life as I should. I will try and reach heaven."

It was all he could say. He wept afresh, bowing his head.

The answer was sufficient.

"O, I am so happy!" she exclaimed. "I am dying so easy! How long shall I be dying, Mrs. Humphreys? It doesn't seem to me like *death*; I do not fear it; I think I shall be so much happier with Jesus; and no more sorrow, and no more sickness, nor trouble, nor pain. O, is this death?"

Her fragmentary expressions so deeply affected her father and her dear friend Mrs. Humphreys that they were unable to answer her much. Mr. Humphreys alone remained calm through the whole.

She thanked both her friends over and over again for their kindest of care, and hoped they would always be happy here, and finally obtain their exceeding great reward. Then she asked Mr. Humphreys if he would not repeat that hymn, which was a favorite one of hers, beginning, —

"Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are;"

which he did, she repeating many of the lines after him,

and seeming to realize the deep truth of each one of them.

She at length lay quiet for some minutes, they all watching her breathing intently. It was evident that the flame was flickering, just preparatory to going out. She seemed to lie in the lap of some sweet dream.

Suddenly she opened her eyes widely, and looked round at each one of them.

“Farewell! farewell! We shall all meet in heaven. Come, Lord Jesus! come quickly!” she exclaimed, in a voice but little above a dying whisper.

These were her last words. She had reached heaven and home at last.

There she lay, looking more like a seraph than a being of earth, her face whiter than the pillow itself, and that dying smile peacefully lingering about her colorless lips.

Gone! Yes, the frail child had gone where frame would be no more exposed to disease, nor heart chilled with the cold contact of earth — where the clouds and the mists are never seen in the sky, and the bright sunshine laughs over the plains eternally.

And still the snows came down without, and the ground was white with its fleecy covering. But the storm was noiseless when the spirit passed away.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BLIND GIRL.

MR. HUMPHREYS had another humble abode where he was in the frequent habit of visiting, and where he gathered many a lesson of life and many a happy experience.

It was at the little house where lived a widow named Margaret Gray. With this woman likewise lived a young girl, who had for many years been blind. Her name was Jessie Dean.

Of her former history but little was really known — no more than that she had been brought into the village by a man who obtained Mrs. Gray's assent to her living with her, for a few years, until she should be grown to womanhood, and that she had a brother somewhere in the far-away metropolis.

She was an amiable and innocent girl, and really of remarkable personal beauty. Her mind was very quick and acute; and she picked up a great deal of intelligence by listening to the conversation of people with whom she was thrown, though the blessing of light was denied her

in her efforts for improvement. To be blind,—O, who can sound the great deep of the darkness? To repeat the burning words of one who has suffered, —

“Around me is a darkness omnipresent,
With boundless horror grim,
Descending from the zenith, ever crescent,
To the horizon’s rim ;
The golden stars, all charred and blackened by it,
Are swept out one by one ;
My world is left as if, at Joshua’s fiat,
A moonless Ajalon.”

Jessie Dean sang in the village choir, and every body said her sweet voice was melody itself. Taking her place in the front row, where her gentle and smiling face could be distinctly seen of all in the church, her songs seemed begotten of real rapture as she electrified the hearts of those below. There was a spirit of deep and true devotion in every line she sang. She literally praised God in song ; it was no lip service, while the heart was wandering away — it was the language of nothing but soul melody itself.

On those heavenly Sundays in the summer, when the windows of the little meeting house were wide opened, and the voices of the singers rang exultant from ceiling to floor, and then floated in broken echoes out into the village street, far away sailed the melodious wave from her sweet voice to many and many a rustic dwelling ; and they who were confined at home of sickness well knew whose happy yet sad notes of praise were those.

Carrie was much interested in Miss Jessie; and had been from the beginning. Whenever she went there, the girl would ask to put her hand in that of her visitor, as if she could thus, with her acutely-sensitive organization, more closely and quickly taste the enjoyment of her sympathies. Her remarks were always characteristic of the most perfect simplicity and innocence of heart. She put many questions; but they were asked so gently, and with such an air of extreme gratefulness for the condescension of her who patiently listened, and in a tone so extremely pitiable and touching,—as if she were all the time appealing to those around her to lift her out of the dark and dismal depths into which she had been plunged,—that none were thoughtless enough to answer her slightly, or in any other mode than as if she challenged and enjoyed their warmest love.

She never complained. She never gave way to exclamations of sorrow, that this heavy visitation was hers. She betrayed no impatience. Every day witnessed her continued sweetness of spirit. Her soul she possessed in calmness and peace.

“And you are so happy always,” said Mrs. Humphreys, one day, while she sat at her side. “If one blind has such reason to enjoy peace, what shall we say for those for whose eyes the world offers its beautiful pictures every day?”

“I try to be contented,” said the girl, with modesty.

Mrs. Gray regarded her with much affection. Every one said Mrs. Gray loved her already like a daughter.

The little room was light and pleasant, and the jasmines were trained to the low windows by her own delicate hand. It was a charming nest, just such a spot as one would look in for happiness.

"Doesn't your spirit feel sore at times, Jessie?" asked Mrs. Humphreys.

"Sore! For what? Have I not every thing I need? Ought I to have more? See how many are my friends; and such as *you*, too, dear Mrs. Humphreys! Does my spirit chafe? O, no indeed! I hope I am not so ungrateful."

"Yet you would see the world if you could?"

"O, yes; if I could get my sight again, I think I should be so much happier. But that cannot be, you know. Every one has his burden, Mrs. Humphreys; this is mine. I hope I try to carry it as humbly as I should. We all set examples, you know."

"Such resignation is the best evidence of a heart set right with God. It ought to provoke a similar disposition all around you."

"Jessie is not peevish at all. She is so good!" said the thoughtful Mrs. Gray.

"I am most sorry that I cannot look at *her* face, Mrs. Humphreys," said Jessie. "She loves me so much more than I deserve."

The woman acknowledged her remark by a grateful smile.

"How can one *help* loving you, Jessie," said the woman,

"when you are always so good? We all love gentle people; and I'm very sure Miss Jessie is one of that sort."

"I sometimes feel," returned the girl, "that afflictions like these are, after all, but blessings; for they make us so many good friends."

"And they teach us, Jessie, above all," added Mrs. Humphreys, "that we must be patient. No lesson is learned more thoroughly of them than this one of patience. And we then know where our help lies. We learn to cast all our cares on God. It is the best of lessons; only it should be thoroughly learned."

"I *hope* I am patient," said Jessie. "I try to be. I pray every day that I may not forget it, even for a single moment. A blind person has so much to think of, Mrs. Humphreys. Is it because they have nothing to *see* that their thoughts are so much quicker?"

She told her that, by the shutting in of the mind so almost completely upon itself, it must necessarily grow more active. It would have fewer objects of thought, but would possess far greater powers of concentration.

"So it seems to me. Sometimes I lie awake so late nights," said Jessie, "and I cannot get asleep. And my thoughts are so strange, too! I cannot always tell if they be thoughts; but I think they are only feelings. Is there a difference, Mrs. Humphreys?"

The latter explained it to her in as clear and comprehensive a manner as she could.

"I go back in my mind, too, and try to fix it in my

memory how things looked once, years ago. I think sometimes I know exactly. And then there comes a blindness over my soul, just as it has come over my sight, and I can see nothing. The whole world looks so dark. It seems to me as if the sun was blotted out, and all my life too. It is such a *strange* feeling, Mrs. Humphreys. Sometimes I shudder when I think of it."

"Blindness must give one far different sensations, both mental and physical, than we can any of us understand, except by suffering in the condition itself," was the reply. "We may freely sympathize with the person afflicted, inasmuch as he or she feels the loss of what we are enjoying; but we cannot truly say that we sympathize with them in all their feelings, those most secret and sacred. I know that must be so."

"It is — it is, Mrs. Humphreys. You seem to understand what my deepest feelings are."

"Yet I do not pretend to yield you as much sympathy as you crave. I cannot; and, indeed, I do not think that any one can. I know that your trials must be great. You must be truly patient, and truly a Christian, to feel perfectly happy under such a heavy affliction."

"O, I only *hope* that I am. I pray continually for a better heart. I hope I grow better every day, Mrs. Humphreys. I think very often how truly my case is like the Christian's whom the Bible tells to enter into his own closet, and commune with his own heart, and be still. I feel as if I were all the time in my closet, with nothing but

my own heart for a companion ; and in the deep of my darkness, O, *how still !*”

So thought Mrs. Humphreys — “ O, *how still !*”

“ But I have such delicious thoughts, too, sometimes,” the girl went on. “ Some people, perhaps, might call them *fancies*. But they give me a great deal of happiness, much more than I can tell you.”

“ They must, no doubt,” said her friends.

“ Why,” added Mrs. Gray, who had listened affectionately to every syllable uttered by her, “ I have seen her sit for more than an hour and say nothing to me ; she was doing nothing but what her own good thoughts gave her to do. And all the time she must have known that I was in the room.”

“ I can *feel* you — I know *always* when you are near, Mrs. Gray,” was the girl’s reply. “ Even if you do not speak to me, I know that you are close at hand.”

“ How strange it is !” exclaimed Mrs. Gray.

“ Some sit and dream when they look into the fire coals, so they tell me. They say they see pictures there that are *so* beautiful. But I have no hearthstone for *my* heart. There is no hearth with its blazing fire for *me* to look into. I can look down only into my own heart, and see the pictures there, and dream over them. It makes me very sad, at times ; but I love to feel such a kind of sadness as that. It does me no harm.”

“ If it is not the cause of discontent,” said Mrs. Humphreys.

“And it is not. I know it is not. If it led to that, I should not give a moment to such thoughts. But it does not. I think such dreams are almost happiness itself, sometimes, dear Mrs. Humphreys. But I try not to be lost altogether in them. Life is too practical for that.”

“No, Jessie, you should not. Our souls cannot always live in dreams. We were formed with active influences, each one of us ; and merely to lose ourselves in dreaminess is to throw our lives away. We do but waste them then all on ourselves.”

These conversations with Jessie were quite frequent from time to time, and they afforded Mrs. Humphreys a secret pleasure. It tasked her own well-equipped intellect, in a measure, to be interrogated as she often was by her, on all subjects, and in every variety of manner.

Such a perfect simplicity of life as the widow Gray and Jessie led was really attractive. It presented to the interested beholder all the whiteness of purity itself. Their nook was a lowly one, altogether out of the reach of the winds and tempests of the world ; but they envied no others their lot. They could not think that others were ever happier than they.

And all through the spring and summer Jessie trained her jasmines around the cottage windows, and felt her slow and hesitating way over the little yard. She would sit beneath an old apple tree in the garden, and there dream away the delicious afternoons ; in the spring, smelling the fragrance of the ruddy blossoms, and listening to the drow-

sy hum of the bees among them — in the early autumn, starting in half affright as the round fruit bounced down on all sides of her seat to the ground. Sometimes she sang the dear old hymns she had sung so sweetly for years in the village choir; and the women and the children who chanced to pass by stopped a little way off to feed on her ravishing melodies.

Mr. Humphreys and his wife both regarded her as an entirely superior being, little assimilated in the peculiar delicacy of her feelings with those around her, and having very much that but few minds could altogether appreciate. Mr. Humphreys could not help gazing at her on Sundays; and he often said, that to watch her face, and to hear her sing, excited his soul to thoughts and emotions of more pure and exalted praise. Her gentleness made all her friends; but her condition called forth their pity. And as one of our little quiet village she thus held her place, using an influence altogether distinct and individual over others, yet coöperating with the rest in working out silently the problem of our lives.

Some even said she was an angel already!

CHAPTER XXII.

THINGS IN GENERAL.

As time went by, even to our quiet little parish it brought its changes. The lowliest are never forgotten by him when he regularly distributes his favors.

Not that notable improvements were undertaken and carried through by the simple force of village enterprise, or that unwonted bustle began to drive out all the rustic spirit from our little street, or that the people all deserted their old-time homes with the sanguine prospect of great gains at "the west" — nothing like this. It is all but a quiet chronicle, and I feel even my own slow pen equal to its proper writing down.

In the first place, because they naturally come in that number, matters at Ingleside progressed peacefully and happily. The loss its inmates had been called so suddenly to endure had by no means left its mark so deeply on their hearts that they refused utterly to be comforted; the wound remained, but its afflictive soreness had been removed; they felt all the strength of the consolations that a truly

Christian belief yielded them, and in humble and firm trust on their Maker could freely say, "Lord, not my will, but thine be done." The grief had wrought with good effect upon them both, and they praised God even in his severe chastisements.

In time, another son was born to them. Him they named Alfred, in memory of one of the twins of which they had been bereaved. He was a bright and promising babe, and they hoped he would live to become an active and useful worker in the Master's vineyard.

And afterwards still another — a boy, too. And they resolved at once that he should bear the name of the other infant. So now they had two children again, and two whose names were Alfred and Arthur. .

In watching the growth and development of children, whether they happen to be our own or not, it is strange how imperceptibly time slips away. If we set down deliberately to count our own years, and to watch the passage of every sand that falls through the glass, the feeling is different. The events that crowd along our way are bigger than aught else, standing out by the roadside like mile-stones. But in looking at our neighbors' children, who, we say to them, seem to have come up like mushrooms, we suddenly lose sight of all intermediate events and circumstances, and our eye slips backward over the years as over a smooth plain, without a single mark by which to measure it. We say, at once, "Who could think time ran away so rapidly?"

And it was just in this kind of manner that people were really astonished to find that Mr. Humphreys' oldest boy had already reached five years. However much the measure of time might seem to them, it was quite a little age to him. The trousers and jacket were put on, and the row of bright buttons bedazzled his eyes as it bedazzles the eyes of boys every where. He was amiable in his disposition, and loved his parents tenderly. A nobler little fellow was nowhere to be found. Most parents in their fondness would have idolized him. But they had already learned a higher lesson than that. They rather felt these two new gifts to be fresh responsibilities from Heaven's hand intrusted to their continual watchfulness and care.

The villagers kept steadily about their business from year to year, excited by no greater affairs than a very large harvest, or a very small one ; talking over their internal interests with the full measure of deliberateness usual among such quiet bodies, and enjoying in their moderate way all the good things this life regularly gave them.

Deacon Burroughs's family were getting on just as fast as the rest ; the younger ones crowding steadily along, and the old ones growing still older. The deacon was ever the same consistent and useful Christian ; plying his earthly tasks industriously, but more industrious still with those that reached forward into heaven. On no single individual could Mr. Humphreys call for help with so sure a prospect of obtaining it just when wanted, and al-

ways without stint. Mrs. Burroughs was disappointed. Every body — so it is said — has his one great disappointment in this life; and Mrs. Burroughs had hers. Well, and what could it be? Why, nothing more nor less than this: she had counted with absolute certainty on Lucy's being the minister's wife! If this were mere scandal I should abhor to narrate it; but it relates intimately to the interests, and especially to the history, of our quiet parish. Mrs. Burroughs did not storm with rage. She did not confide her secret trouble to another. Better if she had, perhaps; for then her heart might finally have rid itself of the "perilous stuff." But she suffered her feelings to brood over it more than she should, till at length it came to assert a peculiar position in her actions, exercising an active, though morbid, influence in matters where she received credit for far different motives.

But Lucy, however much she may have at first listened to her mother respecting it, appeared to shape her course quite widely of any such reflections now; for it was a pretty much settled matter in Brookboro' that Lucy Burroughs was going to marry Joseph Bard right away. Joseph was Mr. Bard's eldest child, and many years older than the rest. He had been quite partial to Lucy always; but the only difficulty with him seemed to be, that Lucy hardly reciprocated his peculiar feeling. Nevertheless, time is said to work wonders; and it finally wrought one here. By some means or another Lucy was converted over to Joseph's side. Was it from some lurking feeling

of disappointment still? Did she think thus to show what some would call a "proper resentment" for not obtaining just the match she had set her ambitious heart on? O Lucy, I fear for you! I cannot help the thought! But better for a nature like yours to unite its earthly happiness with Joseph Bard than to think of becoming the devoted, self-denying, self-accusing, laborious, heroic wife of the clergyman! Better by far, Lucy, for both you and him!

And Mr. Israel Bard had taken Joseph into his business with him, so that there was a safe and certain prospect of his stepping exactly into his father's shoes at some time. His condition, so far at least as earthly comforts went, was certainly well assured as a safe and easy one. He promised to make a respectable trader and a useful member of society. Yes, Lucy would really get a good husband. Yet she sometimes secretly confessed to herself that he was hardly the one her ambition had been hunting after. Lucy was advancing in years, though; and if she meant to marry at all, she must improve her chance. So she thought, and so her mother sometimes more than hinted to her. Very often these things are made to turn on the slightest considerations and the weakest fears.

Mr. Sanger, the lawyer, continued the practice of his profession much after the old way. He was a proud man, rather overbearing in his manner, and determined to uphold the dignity of his pursuit against the claims of all other pursuits whatever. He went about but little into village society, and took no further interest in the matters

of the church than was absolutely necessary to sustain what he imagined his respectability. Successful as he had heretofore been in his practice, he still continued following up those little causes which truly highminded, and, above all, *respectable* lawyers sedulously avoid ; so that his name was not unfrequently associated with eases and persons that could by no possibility bring to it increased fame, but certainly would add increased dishonor. But for this no matter. He stood on his own feet, so he said. He was abundantly capable of sustaining his own honor. And some of the poor fellows round about, who had at sundry times been made to feel the gripe of his power, were perverse enough to say that he certainly could sustain it all, and feel no great inconvenience from the burden either. But that is nothing but scandal.

Mr. Sanger's house was a fine one, and a little disposed, for those times, to stateliness. He had no children, and had never had any. Mrs. Sanger rather led the opinions of the village folk, so far as certain styles and fashions of thinking were from time to time introduced, and was ambitious of the preferment. There was no one to dispute with her successfully for the office.

Mr. Upton and his wife were always the very best of people—he a hard worker day by day, and she keeping his steady industry constant company. The ring from his anvil sounded loud and shrill over that part of the village where stood his low-roofed shop ; and in the cold winter nights the sparks went up by millions through his little

chimney to the dark sky. If a horse or an ox had cast a shoe accidentally, its owner never was obliged to hesitate for a moment where to repair for assistance. The farmers for miles around flocked to his place of labor ; and frequently, on a Saturday, the road about his shop would be crowded with teams, each waiting for its turn. No more practical doers of good and examples of good were any where to be found than Mr. Upton and his wife. Their family was small, consisting of three children with themselves ; and they eked out, from year to year, their full share of happiness.

Mr. Wilkinson continued in his post at the head of the academy, devoted to his calling. He was a conscientious man, and tried to earn the good opinions of his patrons. At some seasons there would be many more scholars than at others ; but this, from the very nature of things, was unavoidable. As one generation of pupils went out into the world from under his hand, it was hardly to be expected that the succeeding one was all ready for him ; there must necessarily be some little *lustrum* between the graduating of the former and the incumbency of the latter. There were famous examinations at the close of the year, always, that were usually succeeded by exhibitions, such as could be afforded by stagestruck youths who had a *penchant* for masks and blackened faces, and loved to strut the boards with swords and rapiers, themselves glittering with cheap tinsel and resonant with rattling chains. Those were truly famous occasions, that had a way of bringing

out pretty much all the latent theatrical talent the school might nourish, and of bringing out crowds from the village and the adjacent country at the same time. The academy, in fact, was one of the main institutions of Brookboro'. Without it the village would have been almost drear and deserted.

Not always the best terms were strictly kept between Mr. Bard and Mr. Plimton, both being storekeepers and in a great degree rivals. Yet Mr. Bard managed to keep the post office in his hands, and that made considerable amends for what he might lose by the rivalry otherwise. But Mr. Plimton was a very fair man, and bore an exceedingly high character for honesty and uprightness. He was slowly accumulating a sufficiency, but it was done by the assistance only of the careful savings peculiar to former times more than to these. His wife was as close a friend as Mrs. Humphreys felt that she had among all the ladies of Brookboro'. Herself quite intelligent, gifted with quick and warm sympathies, and eager to share them all with some other one of a temperament like her own, it was the most natural thing in the world that they should immediately coalesce, and form an attachment not to be disturbed by the little trifles that are sufficient to impede a less earnest acquaintance.

Often did Mr. Humphreys go among the more distant and scattered members of his flock, visiting them in their homes. They always had a warm welcome for him, and something to send by him to his family — now a few skeins

of yarn, to make the children's stockings, and now a cheese or a few balls of their choicest butter, or a pair of yellow-legged chickens. He rarely left them altogether empty handed.

Mr. Johnson was as liberal as any of them. Of his wife he engaged all his butter the year round; and the very nicest of churning it was, too. He was always interested in the farming matters with which Mr. Johnson often regaled him, talking as freely of cattle, and pigs, and poultry, and sheep as if he had been regularly bred to the calling himself. Mr. Johnson's family, too, lived pleasantly; and it was a real pleasure for Mr. Humphreys, occasionally, to carry his wife and little ones over there to pass the afternoon, and take tea in their hearty and sociable way.

There was another body in Brookboro' who should, properly, have been mentioned with more particularity before; and that was Old Nance,—as every one called her,—the negress and washerwoman. It was a little strange, but she was the only colored person in the place. She made herself especially useful to Mrs. Humphreys by her washing and scrubbing services; and whenever the walls of the parsonage needed a fresh and clean coat of whitewash, it was well known that there was no more skilful hand at such work than old Nancy Rivers. She lived alone, and seemed to feel alone. Her words were few indeed; but those few were quite sufficient to betray the peace that reigned in her simple and honest old heart.

Sometimes she had long talks with Mr. Humphreys ; and she always said she felt happier afterwards.

With the Buss family time went smoothly enough, though Mr. Buss said his work was any thing but smooth always. He labored on his farm with all his strength, early and late following his work, ambitious of nothing so much as the accumulation of a little property, and ever eager for a fray in the way of discussion. The old predilection seemed to grow stronger with every year.

And Miss Buss got on as bravely as ever, too — always ready where her presence was expected, and never behind-hand with her active interest and sympathies. A malicious tongue might have branded her as a gossip. It would, however, be as thoughtless as malicious. As for designing deliberately to put the various intelligence her industry gathered up into a form in which it could most damage the character or wound the feelings of others, I really think it was farthest from the kindly-disposed heart of Miss Buss in the world. She liked to see and hear what was going on as well as any one ; and, to confess a little more, she undoubtedly was moved with an ambition to spread what little information her own industry had accumulated. This was all. Nothing more could be charged against her than a perfect freedom from all selfishness and guile. If she could command the attention of others by her narratives, her whole end and aim was reached.

Occasionally Mr. Humphreys exchanged pulpits with his brethren in the adjoining towns ; and it was somewhat fre-

quently that he carried his wife over to Grassville to visit her old friend and schoolmate, who still continued to live there. Those reunions between the friends, — how full of bliss were they to them both ! They freely compared their experience, and learned each of the other much that would help them happily forward in the pathway of life.

And quietly the affairs of Brookboro' progressed from year to year — peace and plenty within the old town borders, the people leading exemplary and useful lives, and their devoted pastor working with continued and unfaltering energy to save, through Christ, every member of his little flock, that not one might be lost in that last day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH OF A FATHER.

IN all the time that Mr. Humphreys had continued an exile from the paternal roof, he had not heard a word directly from home. All correspondence with his father was finally cut off. Once, indeed, he had addressed his parent a letter, full of affectionate anxiety and expressing the most constant and tender interest in his welfare, and earnestly uttering the hope that every former cause of alienation was at an end. But to this letter no response ever came. The proud father was nursing his pride still. His haughty nature would not bend. His soul was not accustomed to yield a tittle to any one. Affection was but as chaff, blown away by the strong winds of his pride.

It wore on the spirits of the faithful son perceptibly. Yet, save to his devoted wife, he had never breathed the secret that so greatly troubled him. No other knew the canker that corroded his happiness day by day. His memory continually carried him back to those times of infantile innocence when the love of his father was as certain and

undivided as the love of a father could be, and no worldly cloud came in between it and him to eclipse even ever so little of his happiness. He grew melancholy sometimes in living over again the days that were only sunshine, and in contrasting them with the arid waste that stretched out between himself now and himself then. To be discarded of a parent is truly no light thing, and the more particularly when one feels that his own duty has been fully done, and still his efforts prove unavailing.

Take this lesson to your hearts, ye proud fathers and haughty mothers, whose blood becomes black for the worldly passion that scorches it in your veins, that there will certainly come, sooner or later, a bitter, bitter reckoning with your consciences; that, whether the delay is much or little, it *will* be terminated at the last. Your own hearts will themselves plead earnestly and continually for the judgment. Your own natures will at length begin morbidly to crave the very punishment they feel to have been put off already too long.

From the clergyman at Briarfield Mr. Humphreys had often received intelligence of interest about home, and their correspondence grew frequent and regular. This relieved his spirit in a measure, for he could at least hear from the dear old home spot.

Matters had latterly begun to take quite a strange and unexpected turn at Briarfield. The younger brother, James, had proved himself altogether a different man from what was to have been expected of him. Discovering the exact

relations existing in the family at the period of William's departure, he devoted himself for some time to nothing but flattering and feeding the prejudices of his father; and it was not a very long time, either, before he had succeeded in inflaming them to a pitch at which he felt it safe to ask for himself just what favors he most desired.

One thing after another was allowed him. One and a second point were yielded to him. Slowly he worked his hand along to the handle of the whip, which, when he should finally get hold of it, he meant to use for another purpose than merely that of asserting his own importance and power.

As an almost natural result, he was speedily acknowledged the leader and ruler in the household. The same father who had so tyrannously decreed in the case of one son, seemed to have no will or purpose whatever in that of the other. Whatever he expressed as his wish, he knew was quite equal to a law already. He long ago learned to scout influence, authority, or even advice, and trusted to nothing but his own headstrong impulses.

Finally he left home; the village was too circumscribed for the lengthening radius of his operations. He went to the city. A brief career was long enough to plunge him inextricably in debt. From this his father relieved him. But the relief proved only temporary. The whole experiment had to be tried over again, this time on a rather more extended scale. The father was by no means backward, either. The memory of his cruel treatment of his

eldest son might have been the means of goading him into temporary madness in the management of his business. A strange power seemed to possess him ever since the event of his eldest son's departure. He was not wholly himself, and did not always refer back his actions to a reasonable and considerate class of motives.

The blow came at last. It had been delayed for some time, but could not always be kept back. Mr. Humphreys became an indorser for his son James for every dollar he was worth ; and every dollar he was worth *was gone !*

Worse than this, the reprobate son had fled, leaving his now impoverished father to fight the battle all over again with poverty, and either rise or fall as fate or fortune might determine.

A miserable character was his ; respected of none, unwilling to return home again among the friends and companions of his youth, an outcast and an exile, he hardly knew or cared whither he turned his steps next.

The Briarfield clergyman was about writing all this intelligence to the one whom he knew most interested in hearing it, when suddenly Mr. Humphreys, senior, gave entirely up, and took to his bed. Spirits, health, ambition, every thing failed him.

In this condition of body and mind he sent immediately for the clergyman, requesting him to write forthwith to his son in Brookboro'. He desired nothing so much as his presence at his bedside. The clergyman, therefore, added the request to the letter he had just prepared, and de-

spatched it by the earliest post. This letter found the young clergyman in Brookboro' as depressed about his father's alienation as ever. When, however, he fully gathered the astounding import of the intelligence, costly as the sacrifice had been that produced so great a change in his father's feelings, he deemed it of less importance than the continued alienation itself; and he could not help secretly rejoicing that even so untoward an event as this might otherwise seem had been the means of levelling the olden prejudices and letting in the sunshine of affection again.

He started off at the earliest moment for Briarfield, alone. While he was gone, it was arranged that Mrs. Hawley should come over from Grassville and stay at Ingleside parsonage with her old friend.

It was an autumn day when he entered Briarfield again, that place where his early and purest affections centred, and rode in the direction of his father's house. The old homestead!—how dearly he loved it still!—the spot where his heart first learned attachment, where his mind first opened its eyes, where a mother had tenderly educated him from earliest infancy, where he had seen that mother die! How could he but feel the shadows of melancholy creeping over his heart as he first drew in sight of that endeared place, its roofs and windows looking familiarly to his eye, the old trees waving their arms as of yore, the yard and all the grounds the same as ever to his vision—but *all else* so changed! It was rather a saddening hour, too, being the time of twilight, and outward objects wore a sombre hue.

He walked rapidly up the pathway, and went in without a knock. The place he knew well enough; he needed no guide there. Along the hall he directed his steps, up the stairs, along the entry to the door of his father's chamber. Must he not be lying in the old room? He softly opened the door — a mere crack — and peered in. No one was in the apartment, so far as he could see. He opened the door still wider; there was the old, high-canopied bedstead there; a wasted form lay on the bed. He rushed in, and stood over his father.

While he stood in silence and gazed at the altered face of his parent, the tears streaming from his eyes as his thoughts began to marshal the olden memories again before him, the sick man opened his eyes and looked straight into those of his long-banished son.

"My father! My son!" were simultaneous expressions on the part of both. William bent down and embraced the now broken-hearted old man with the warmest affection.

"Father," said he, "I thank you for sending for me. I am so much the happier for seeing you at this time, when you must know that my motives can be only true ones."

"My son — my son!" exclaimed the parent, speaking with much difficulty, and reaching out his hand for the pressure of his dutiful child, "I have done a wrong thing — a *very* wrong thing! I don't know what influenced me to do as I did. I was not always myself; I could not be always myself." A pause. "I *hope* you can forgive me, William!"

"Dear father, do not lay that to heart too much. It is all past now. Do you think I could treasure that up against you? O, no, my father! I have ever loved you. I knew you did not wish me the least wrong—I knew you *could* not wish me any wrong. I felt that all would be explained at some future time."

"Yes, and I was putting off that time so long, William, that God in his judgment saw fit to hasten it for me. Do you know what has happened?"

"All—all."

"Then I need not repeat it again to you. But there is still another thought that troubles me. My property is gone—the whole of it."

"Lay not up for yourself treasures on earth, father. They are so uncertain. We cannot depend upon them for so much as a day."

"But—but, my son, what injustice am I not doing *you*? I cannot leave you a dollar! All is gone!"

"And why need your mind be troubled about that, if mine is not? Believe me, dear father, the riches of this world are the least of my care. They are essential only to provision for the wants of the body. They cannot insure us happiness. No, father, long ago did I give up all such thoughts. I beg you not to burden your mind with a single one of that character for me. You have other things, far more important than this, to think of."

"Ah, yes—yes! far, far more important! That I have. But who can direct me? My son, I am blind. I am grop-

ing my way about. My feet stumble. Can any one help me? Can any one show me the way?"

He spoke this in a tone so entirely different from any hitherto usual with him, that it startled his son as it fell on his ear.

" 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!' Christ calls you, dear father, in words like these. Is there any doubt where you are to go, then?"

"Ah, but this heart — this sinful heart, now slowly, slowly breaking! It is too old in rebellion. He will not accept it, though I should lay it at his feet. No — no — no! it is too late, William — *too late!* O, how those words sound in my ears! How did I ever know, my son, that with me their lightest accents would be so terrible? Your dear mother — O, how much she labored for us all! — not more for my children than for myself. She had her heart always in the work. I wish I could have taken the right views of life she did; I should be so much happier now; we should all be so much happier. But see what a change! — what a wicked thing it is! And what do you think has brought it all about, William?"

The son made no reply.

"Remorse! remorse! O, remorse!" cried he, suddenly; "myself — it was only *myself*, who has done it all! Is there any help for one like me? Can *I* be saved? Can one who has thrown his life away as I have come into the fold at last? O, no, no! — it is impossible — impossible! William, my dear son, what *shall* I do."

“Cast yourself entirely into the arms of your Savior. He will save all who come unto him, to the very last. His is such a salvation as men have not for one another. No arm is so strong to relieve as his. No bosom is so full of tender mercy and compassion. He is ever ready for us all; and not one will be finally cast out that comes to him in submission. Father, can you not call on your Savior in a time of need? Have you no *faith* in your heart? Can you not humble yourself like a little child, and sue to him for the true grace that will make you one of his children?”

“Do *you* counsel me thus, my son? *You*, whom I have cast out from my house, from my very sight? — whom I rejected as unworthy of your haughty father, while the one I cherished so foolishly deserts me in the hour of trial? O, what punishments does not Heaven have in store for wrong doers! Your very kindness chastises me more than your deadliest hatred could. I cannot bear to hear you speak so to me. Your words are like two-edged swords. They stab my heart at every syllable. Yet I deserve it all — I deserve it all. O that the folly of my course did not make itself apparent before! Wretched — wretched man that I am!”

“Father, there is hope for all, and there is room for all. No nature so far astray that Christ’s love cannot draw it back again. Do you ever *pray*, father?”

“Pray! *I* pray! A man whose heart, for so many years, has been all choked with pride, — *such* a man pray!”

“Do you not think that your prayers will be heard? Has Christ refused to listen to one who comes to him humbly and trustfully? Has he not directly said that a contrite heart he does not despise? Father, do not entertain these wrong views any longer. Try to compose your heart to peace. Your thoughts will thus be the more satisfying in this hour.”

“O, if I only *could* compose myself! If I only *could*! But it is too late. Fatal words — *too late*!”

The son knelt down by the bedside, without further words, and offered prayer.

Instantly the father closed his eyes, threw back his head upon the pillow, clasped together his emaciated hands, and joined in the petition.

It would baffle human skill or human power to describe the fearful conflict that raged at that moment in the old man's breast; to tell how fear went up, and hope went down; how the dark shadows, black with their brooding terrors, trailed over the surface of his thoughts, beclouding his whole existence, and then bright glimpses — often nothing more than glimpses — threw in their dancing and irregular light between the crevices made in the gloom; how the stars stood forth in his heaven, and then suddenly faded away; how his soul struggled with all these surging waves of fear, crying aloud in its helplessness for relief, and then felt that no hand was stretched out to save, and no arm was nigh for it to rest upon. All through that prayer was the struggle continued. It racked his soul to

its very centre. The earth, many a time, receded from his vision with all its toys and tinselry. The false coverings were suddenly stripped off. Every thing stood out in its true size and position. And if now he sighed, and now he despaired, — now hoped, and now gave up his last hold on all he felt was lost, — it is no pen guided by human hand that could depict the agony of remorse that burned its way through the very marrow of his thoughts, or paint the colors that alternately appeared and disappeared over the heaven of his beclouded vision.

The son ceased, and, rising to his feet again, took his father's hand in his own.

He began, in low and affectionate tones, trying to soothe the tempest that fear and remorse had raised. He repeated the declarations of Jesus for those who were ready and willing to accept the free salvation he offered, and become members of his faithful flock that could never stray from his fold. All the consolations the Bible offered were laid before him. All its many promises were recounted. The hope of the sinner was described as being the same hope by which the Christian lived and drew his heart's sustenance.

His words had an evident effect on the father. When at last he stopped talking, he found himself very much prostrated from the unnatural and long-continued excitement. A servant came in, ushering the doctor; and William met an old friend again, after many years' absence.

Leaving his father, who had now begun to doze, in the

care of the village physician, he hurried down stairs himself to take refreshments after such extended exertion. The old family servant was still there, the same who had waited on him in boyhood. Nothing seemed changed, only there reigned a stillness over the house that, at odd moments, forced itself upon his sensibilities as something almost sepulchral. The voice of his sainted mother still seemed to echo along the hall. The laugh of his more boisterous brother still rang along the passages. And then, when it came over him that this was but a delusion, he wept from the excitement of his deepest and strongest feelings.

It was very late when he finally left the bedside of his father, and all that precious time had been jealously improved, too. The parent seemed to have a prognostication that that was to be his last night on earth, and told his son so plainly. William labored to banish such unprofitable thoughts from his mind, telling him that we ought all of us to be ready to take our departure in God's good time, whenever it might come. He was left alone with his father again, and prayed with him once more. The poor man said he felt happier after it, and thanked his son with every grateful expression he could command.

When he came to take him by the hand and to bid him "good night," he could not help saying, in a sunken and terribly distinct tone, —

"This is my last night here — I know it, I feel it. God have mercy on me at the last!"

The expression of his eyes was not by any means alto-

gether natural as the saddened son turned to retire to his own apartment. There was a sort of wildness in it that betrayed the fierce working of his thoughts. The recollection of it ever after impressed the son's heart deeply.

The remainder of the night wore away quietly. The watchers remained at their post in the sick chamber, ready to minister at any moment to the wants of the dying man. The house was silent as a sepulchre. Occasionally the baying of a village dog broke on the still air without, and then all became quiet again.

Night is solemn in itself; but night in a sick room,—the watch steadily ticking till its sounds pulsate almost like the striking of a clock,—the room made gloomy by the subdued light, shaded to the very verge of darkness,—a collection of cups and vials upon the table and the little stand,—every word spoken in a whisper, that echoes in the heart far louder than a cry,—every step taken so carefully, as if the slightest jar might cause untold distress,—this is what impresses deeply the stoutest heart, and sometimes appalls the tenderer sensibilities.

It was somewhat late in the morning when William awoke; and, springing from his bed, he hurried on a few articles of clothing and went to his father's door. They had suffered him to sleep as long as he would, to get rest from his great fatigue and excitement; and the sun, therefore, had been up a considerable time when he put his hand on the latch of the door of the sick room and pushed in.

The first sight he saw startled him — the window was open !

He looked quickly around the room. No one was there — the place was deserted.

This struck him as very strange. The whole truth did not immediately dawn on him. The opened window might have told him all.

He took hasty strides across the floor to the bedside. The sight there struck him dumb.

The upturned face, — the closed and sunken eyes, — the sharp outline of the features, — the terrible silence and calm, — these told him of the death of his father !

He bowed his head, stricken with the great load of grief that pressed upon his heart.

The old man's fears proved true. It *was* his last night on earth ; and he had gone from the place that had known him so long, but which now would know him no more forever.

Mr. Humphreys was an orphan. But, in reality, his orphanage had begun when he caught the dying blessing of his mother.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUR SINGING SCHOOL.

BROOKBORO' would never have been Brookboro' without its singing school. No, indeed. That was one of its peculiar institutions ; that was one of the yearly notches cut in our village calendar, by which we were the better able to observe our progress in matters musical, social, and even matrimonial. I feel obliged to append the last item to the list, because candor requires it to be confessed that more matches were made at singing school, especially among the younger folk, than at any other place or time. And that seems to be one of the important truths in village history every where.

Mr. Zebulon Beard was chorister, or choir leader, for a great many years. He was elected at a very early age, as such matters generally go in country choirs, and had managed to keep his seat through all the shocks incident to choral organizations. This, at least, was something worth speaking of. Added to the fact of this good luck of his was yet another — he was an excellent vocalist.

To sing was what nearly every person in the parish thought he or she could do ; but to sing *well*, — to do it in a way that betrayed acquaintance with singing as a *science*, — to be sure and make only *melody* of it, — that was what very few could really prove themselves fully equal to. Mr. Beard, however, was admitted to be rather a master hand at his calling, and could catch a note from the quaver of a pitchpipe as skilfully as any other one who could be produced.

Winter after winter the singing school was kept up. Without a single exception, it had always held its meetings in the little, low, brick school house that stood exactly at the junction of the village street and a cross road. The room was small, illy ventilated, provided with no greater comforts in the line of seats than a double row of low planks, for benches, that formed a hollow square about the hot iron box stove, and always so meagrely lighted that recognition was, not unfrequently, quite out of the question.

There they sat, ranged in double rows around the room, on those hard wooden benches — the males on one side of the house and the females on the other. It was expected of every scholar, whether man, woman, or child, that he or she bring a separate candle, that so the expense of weekly illumination might be equally defrayed. This regulation was often the occasion of a great deal of mirth ; for some came with little blunt stumps of candles, just in their last sputtering throes, blackened all over with previous fires, and stuck, as a final resort, into a flat turnip carefully

pared for this particular time. It was ludicrous to see them going about from one seat to another, now leaning backward, and now reaching forward, to get a light from a neighbor and incidentally whisper something that had no connection with the light at all. A stranger would have done more than merely smile, I fear, if he could have looked in unexpectedly upon our musical group — candles dancing, wavering, and glimmering; heads and figures in all possible attitudes and positions; feet, some of them, perched high on the backs of the benches before them; eyes staring and mouths agape; and the persevering instructor trying to make accomplished musicians of every one.

Once in a great many winters the musically inclined of the parish managed to raise funds enough to secure the weekly services of an itinerant singing teacher; and then each week the village felt a thrill of excitement and enthusiasm from which it hardly recovered before the entire seven days had gone round again. When Mr. Pratt did come there was a notable stir. Every body seemed suddenly to awake and to be rubbing his eyes. The girls were especially lively. It was a grand gala time for them. They had only the pleasantest pictures to make into prospects for the whole winter.

How boldly Mr. Pratt began! With what a readiness did he take hold of his work, cutting and slashing this side and that; carrying every thing fairly by storm that they had trembled to meet before! What an off hand, attractive, impressive way he had! Not one of all the males

in the parish who could sing a note but looked on him and his attainments with the purest envy, albeit they might not have known it to be such.

Breves and semibreves ; quavers and semiquavers ; staffs, scales, flats, and sharps ; alto, tenor, bass, treble, and all besides ; beats, rests, and stops, — how they rattled from the oily end of his glib tongue, till the heads of his listeners were crammed full with no knowledge but the knowledge of music ! He was a wonderful man ; every body admitted it ; and the only pity seemed to be that the village could not secure sufficient pecuniary provision for his attendance every winter. Yet half the time was better than not to have him at all, even as half a loaf is often spoken of as being better than no bread.

It was more particularly under his tuition that Mr. Beard had reached his present state of proficiency ; and it is very natural to conclude that his style of singing and directing in the choir was as exact a copy of Mr. Pratt's manner as he was able to compass. He flourished more than was necessary, and beat the air wildly with his book, and ealled it only beating time. Occasionally his managerial gestures were rather more extended than was fairly consistent with actual necessity ; and he now and then knocked in the crown of a bonnet unawares, tilting up its front at an angle quite different from that so sedulously studied by the wearer.

At the schools the men twisted off the burning wicks of their candles with their fingers when the wicks got to be

too long, while the girls used their scissiors for that office. They telegraphed to each other across the floor in secret and symbolic methods, which made the singing all the pleasanter to them. When, as at the beginning of every "quarter," they were drilled in reading the notes, and in giving every one its proper expression, the veriest misanthrope must have laughed at times to listen to the blatant noises that proceeded from the snarl and jumble of voices. And they laughed themselves, too, and thought there was no better fun to be had any where for as much as four times the money.

"*Will* you give me your attention now? Fa, sol, la, si," &c. /

Such was Mr. Zebulon Beard's very frequent appeal to them. They had rather more respect for Mr. Pratt, for he could command their attention whether they would or no. It was hardly so with his disciple. Mr. Beard's tongue often failed him when his hands insisted on proceeding; and the natural consequence was, that he would be left standing in a highly gesticulatory attitude sometimes, with not a word on his tongue to help him out of his difficulty; just as a vessel may lie stuck in the oozy mud of some flat, waiting only for the tide to return and relieve her. These little scenes caused tittering now and then, which, in their turn, produced additional gesticulation, and dammed up the tide of words still higher than ever.

But all of them *learned* at the winter singing school; there was no gainsaying that. Children, even, walked up

the music bars as easily as hodmen climb their ladders. The girls and boys all made progress. Their parents confessed it. Their own persistent efforts, both in school and out, abundantly attested it. In good time, those who were now just beginning would step into the places in the village choir vacated by deaths and marriages there. The musical stock was kept continually replenished. There were no fears that the church would have to listen to prayers and not to praises also.

Where the present fathers and mothers first learned acquaintance with one another, whispering behind their book covers and stealing off finally together home, there the children were duly improving their time in the same style, and promised to unite old village families in bonds closer than those of friendship merely. The singing school was one of the best places in the world for what people call "sparking." The result fully established a fact so peculiar. Mary was expected to go home with almost every young beau there was present; for Mary was the village belle. And Margaret found her name written in a great many more books than belonged to her, with some sentimental quatrain becomingly attached. And the Lucys, and Elizabeths, and Joannas, and Julias that came along after to assert their claims,—they managed very easily to engage the attention of quite all the rest.

What a giggling there was when school "let out"! What unnecessary confusion in assorting the hoods, and bonnets, and shawls, even although they had been hung up

in the first place with scrupulous care ! How oddly some one of the boys got mixed in with a snarl of roguish girls, who made his face afire with blood, and his ears tingle with their sharp remarks, before he effected his extrication again ! What promises of visits were then made, that were to answer for the whole of the coming week ! What invitations were extended on all sides, and how they were increased, and persisted in, and repeated ! What an inextricable snarl they all got into, before they finally reached the door and crowded into the cribbed little entry ! What a dire confusion of tongues, fair type in its way of a model Babel ! What laughing, and greeting, and shaking of hands, and telling of secrets, and exclamatory "Os" and "Ahs" ! Were ever such times before ? Did ever days go by to which the hearts of the participators would afterward turn back with fonder regrets and more tender memories ?

Our little village singing school had its own peculiar influence. It made itself felt in all the ramifications of our social state. Beginning at the brick school house at the cross road, it sent its legitimate pulsations through all the smaller and larger veins of our society, until its warmth culminated in the church itself.

Let none speak of village singing schools triflingly. For myself, I have a sort of regard for them that I can compare with nothing but itself. They are genial nurseries of some of our best and truest social sentiments. If we could do without them altogether, we should have to make up our minds to do without a great deal more besides.

And is there no pleasant recollection connected with these schools, twining itself about the feelings of my reader's heart, on which grow some of the tenderest of sentiments? Do all those long-past winter evenings lie like a waste in the memory, with not so much as a twig or a flower lifting its head above the soil by which to recognize the spot where once there slept, in truth, the "happy valley"?

CHAPTER XXV.

A ROADSIDE ROSE.

NOT a vine, intertwining itself around the friendly supports proffered it, and bearing only green leaves that form a ruffle but make no shade.

Not a delicate hothouse plant, that the few come now and then to admire in their most unnatural way, and is afterwards useful to none.

Not a precious gem, too brilliant to be touched and too costly to be enjoyed; that must needs be put under lock and key, and set in a framework of gold, and very rarely be taken out to be seen of others.

But a rose — a real, rich, red rose, blooming by the side of an old country wall. Did ever the good reader happen to observe such? It was nothing more than a very simple flower; and there it bloomed almost unseen and unknown. Its fragrance was for any and for all. It climbed up affectionately by the side of a plain little cot, refusing to be transplanted to any other soil. That was

home. That was the rich heart soil. There could be none richer than that.

Quite a mile out of the village Mrs. Nevins lived, in a low, small, cottage house, browned with every wind and rain, and sheltered but partially from the storms and the heat by a coppice of chestnuts that were suffered to stand near the road. One would have thought, in passing the spot, there could be room for little more than contentment there besides the humble inmates; and of that there was a plenty.

Mrs. Nevins was poor, and supported herself solely with her needle. When Mr. Humphreys first came to Brook-boro', her daughter Charlotte was quite a little girl, attracting the attention of passers by her dancing before her mother's door. Now she was seventeen years old at least. For several years she had been a great help to her mother, so that by uniting their labor they made matters get on very comfortably. A merchant in another town furnished them, as he did several others, with work, which he sent for again at stated times, settling in cash payments punctually.

Mother and daughter grew together, therefore, rapidly. Charlotte helped clear away the breakfast table, got ready the work of the day for both, and then sat down beside her mother at her labor. They sewed and talked; and they talked thoughtfully, too. No hours were altogether unimproved by them. It formed one of the prettiest of pictures, their snug little sitting room on an evening in winter, with the heaped work table drawn out into the middle of the

floor, the dimity curtains down, the fire snapping and blazing on the hearth, a cat purring at their feet, and their own needles going industriously. Sometimes Charlotte read aloud of an evening to her mother from some book of travels she had managed to borrow from a friend in the village, or from a volume of sermons Mrs. Humphreys had from time to time offered them, or from the old Bible that stood on the little stand in the corner. The time passed as pleasantly with the widowed mother as if she had been in the midst of many friends; for her daughter was with her, and that was all her heart desired.

From childhood itself, Charlotte Nevins had been remarked by every one a sweet girl. She practised so charmingly the duty of obedience. Her mother filled her own heart so full with love. Her nature developed itself so beautifully, like the gradual unfolding of the red rose to which I have likened her, dispensing its fragrance on all sides of her. Though so humbly placed in life, her heart knew no less of happiness therefor; without doubt it fed itself all the more bountifully in its involuntary seclusion. Her manners were exceedingly *naïve* and simple, as her feelings were exceedingly direct and true. The very taste with which she attired herself, limited as her wardrobe must have been, bespoke real refinement and cultivation.

The veriest child of nature she seemed, after all. She climbed all the walls and fences in the neighborhood, and gathered the earliest and latest flowers from the fields and pastures. She knew by heart all the pleasant nooks, re-

cesses, dells, and hiding-places about in the woods, or by the brook that curled its way down through the lowland not far from her door, or among the little hills that embossed the landscape with their gentle swells. She delighted to run free. She listened, as a nymph of the woods would listen, to catch the whispers that were breathed to her in the wind. She let the big raindrops of the summer shower patter on her brown cheek till it was ruddy with the glow of health. Her eyes thoughtfully followed the clouds that sailed so quietly across heaven's deep-blue sea, or rested among the piled masses of gold and purple in the west, and her fresh young heart became saddened with a melancholy that was sweeter to her than actual joy itself. She was a little dreamer, too, as we all are at times ; and she dreamed her dreams in the woods and by the brookside, on the hills and beside her mother's door.

How true is it, that the world never looks in the right place for the beauty it pretends so much to admire ! Had it known that so simple a life was being lived here in the shade of that old chestnut coppice, by the side of that ragged stone wall, would its eyes have been turned aside for even a glimpse of a charm that could not but challenge all real and true admiration ? What nonsense do half our conventional rules and tastes amount to, after all ! A bud, a flower, a freshly-opened rose, — these are nothing, unless they lose the richness of their beauty in the tide of a fragrance not one half so natural as theirs. The simple field flowers are in no sort of favor. If really beautiful,

their commonness destroys the charm. And so is a hollow artificiality ingrafted on nature ; and things lose or confuse their real meanings.

But every natural heart leaned fondly towards Charlotte, for she was nothing less than nature itself. The very arrangement of her dress was in perfect keeping with this idea. Her golden hair, that curled naturally, she suffered to fall in its long ringlets down her neck and over her shoulders ; and she often made a mirror of the rivulet, or of some embayed little pool, in which she studied its decoration with wild flowers, and leaves, and bits of evergreen. Her eyes were large and blue ; and they were alive with affectionate expression. Her figure was cast in the most graceful mould. There was nothing constrained or artificial about her. Every action was as free and natural as the very breeze that lifted her hair and kissed her healthy-looking cheeks.

The little parlor—if such it might be called—was made, in time, quite a museum of natural curiosities that Charlotte had collected here and there from the fields. She made baskets of the pine burrs, and varnished them till they looked like precious wood. Her skill was directed to the arrangement of the gray and silvery mosses she brought from the woods, over which she sprinkled liberally the various specimens of minerals her industry had been years in collecting. Every summer she gathered grains and grasses, out of which she assorted beautiful bunches, placing them on the little low mantel. The house became,

in fact, a little temple of nature; and Charlotte was the priestess. Under her hand, what would otherwise have been but rude and unattractive, instantly became clothed with a charm and a beauty no heart could resist. The plain and cheap furniture looked vastly more comfortable than supplies of plush and velvet. She had a secret art of arranging even the chairs, so that they seemed to invite you to sit down. The carpet, all made of rags, still betokened better the tidy and tasteful mistress than does many a spread of Axminster and Brussels. The loop of the curtains,—her gentle hand was to be seen even there.

It would be a very strange affair, if, after fairly earning such general admiration, Charlotte Nevins should fail to attract some single one to her especially. Her heart was formed for love, and she *was* loved.

The enviable one on whom her young affections were so generously bestowed was really worthy of her. She would be happy in his regard. Duncan Morrow was a young swain of a town many miles distant, the promising son of a thrifty, well-to-do farmer, and devoted in his attachment to Charlotte. How they became acquainted, or when, it is not necessary to relate. It is enough that they were already engaged to be married, and that the day was now not very far distant.

Charlotte was to become the mistress of another house; and after a little time, just so soon as matters could be arranged, her mother was to have a home with her. That was all understood. And, looking forward to this pleas-

antest of earthly prospects, happy in the affection of her lover, herself as artless and simple in her feelings as guilelessness itself could be, she sang the days away, waiting for the one to dawn that was to make her happiness complete.

Duncan came to see her one afternoon, stopping as he passed through that part of Brookboro'. She met him as gayly as ever at the door, extending him a warm welcome. He dismounted from his wagon, and entered the little cottage.

"You don't come as often as you used to, seems to me," said Charlotte's mother.

He felt compelled to reproach himself that he had staid away longer than usual.

His eyes and Charlotte's met. Their faces were covered with blushes.

Mrs. Nevins would have him drink a cup of tea before he went, early in the afternoon as it was. So she set to work over the kitchen hearth, and in a very short time had prepared for him quite a refreshing meal. He partook plentifully, and departed soon after, promising to be over in a few days again, when he would stay longer. Taking his leave of her mother, he still stood in the door with Charlotte. His wagon was on the other side of the road.

"Wouldn't you ride a little way with me?" he asked her.

Her eyes kindled. "Just a short distance," said she.

So in she ran to tell her mother of her determination,

and to throw her light sun bonnet over her head. She would be back again in a very short time. Her mother need not fear for her at all.

As she climbed up into the wagon her face was all aglow with pleasure. Duncan took his seat beside her, and off they went down the road, her clear laugh still ringing in the ears, and in the heart, too, of her mother.

"The happy creature!" exclaimed her parent, as she saw her go out of her sight.

They rode on slowly, neither fairly thought or understood how far. To the cross roads, where Charlotte first determined to get out; but she was not ready to break away from the side of her lover *then*. To the little knoll, from which she happened to think she could behold him for at least a mile after leaving her; but she seemed to have gone as yet no distance at all. Finally, Duncan stopped himself.

"I suppose I know what that means," said she, and prepared to jump to the ground.

"Isn't it a long ways home?" he asked. "I'm afraid you will meet with some harm if you go farther."

All this was said in the most affectionate tone, and they parted. He was to be at the cottage soon again, for so he promised.

Charlotte walked slowly back until she came to a little swell of ground, and there she stopped and watched him until he disappeared. As she turned away her long lashes were wet. They were tears, but not tears altogether of sadness.

Instead of pursuing her way home by the road she had come, she chose a circuitous course across and around the fields, eager as ever to feed her nature on the sights of quiet beauty that abounded on every hand. Climbing the wall at a gap, she turned her steps across the carpet of grass that stretched by the acre before her. How beautiful every thing looked! Through the atmosphere of her temporary sadness she beheld objects in a light not altogether real. Plucking the little flowers here and there, she clasped them in brilliant bunches, holding them up now and then to admire them. Over large tracts she wandered, some of the time going quite away from the direction homeward, and sometimes straying back again. Her thoughts were with the absent one. So lost was she in them that she hardly knew where she was or whither she was wandering.

At all events, it is certain she did not see the great black cloud that had suddenly drifted up between her and the sun, casting its dark shadow every where over the landscape. She could not have heard the low and distant mutterings of thunder, as they rolled onward towards the zenith, like troubled spirits threatening soon to rend the thick veil of their dungeon.

Presently the big drops came pattering down. They fell upon her hand. She looked up. One fell exactly on her cheek. Gazing about her, the better to comprehend the exact state of things, she discovered in a moment that a heavy shower had overtaken her. She was but thinly

clad. She had no protection against the wet. The rain would be sure to drench her. Where should she go? She must flee, and that instantly. Down came the drops now, thicker, larger, faster. The pent-up thunder muttered louder and louder, till it belched forth its horrible roars. The lightning grew suddenly fierce, and white, and glaring. Run,—run,—that was all she could think of.

It was but a few steps to the shelter of a fine rock-maple tree, whose thick foliage offered her its generous protection. The drops came driving down among the leaves the moment she had secured her position. A strong wind surged immediately from the west, and blew aside the leaves on the smaller trees and bushes till the branches looked almost denuded. She shivered, yet she did not shudder. So familiar had she become with nature in all its phases, she neither felt nor knew a fear now. She was as much at ease in a driving storm as in the laughing sunshine.

The thunders became more and more violent. They rattled hither and thither over the concave of heaven, till they sounded like the bellowing reports of an enemy's cannon. The ground on which she shiveringly stood was shaken. Quick and close upon the reports of the thunder flashed the white flames of the lightning. They dazzled her eyes till they were almost blinded. They seemed to wreath themselves about the tall trees till the trees looked for a brief moment like spires and columns of fire. Once or twice she staggered backward, unable to keep her senses about her in the terrible shocks of the thunder.

The rain poured down in an unbroken flood. The ground was washed every where as with a river. Streams ran helter skelter here and there, and made short cuts across the fields to hollows not yet filled. She could not see the distant walls, so dense was the watery sheet that let itself down between her and them. The far-off trees looked to her like huge hulks of dismantled ships breaking slowly through thick vapors and white fogs.

It was not terror that she felt, for that had not yet had power to freeze her soul; but something akin to it had certainly begun to work upon her. She did not thus shake and tremble without a cause. Ah, few were the summer tempests, many as they were that she had seen, that had hitherto wrought with such power on her. And few indeed were the tempests that had ever before appeared to any one more terrible.

But in the midst of her natural fears an unknown strength seemed to steal to her heart, that, while her limbs shook, made that comparatively calm. She stood and watched the angry mass of clouds with feelings that bordered even on delight. How they crowded their dark heads one above another! — she thought, to get only a look at her. What brilliant flashes of fire were those that darted so quickly here and there through the sky, lighting up the edges and rifts of the clouds with a beauty she could not but admire! Her eyes were fixed upon the

sight that, despite her weaker fears, gave her such undivided wonder and delight.

* * * * *

There was one flash, quicker, brighter than the rest. Close upon the flash was heard a crash, resounding every where throughout the sky. A tongue of white flame licked up the life of the beautiful maple, and a simple soul went back to heaven on the wings of its hot and deadly breath.

They found her lying there, beneath the tree, drenched with the rain. She had lain out all night, none knowing where to seek for her. Her mother hoped she had gone home with Duncan, and early in the morning a messenger was despatched with the inquiry. But no child was to be found. The lover came back with the messenger, his heart distracted with fears.

They searched and searched in all directions. They started from the spot where she and he had parted, and went off in every quarter, scouring the woods and fields. The lover himself was the first to find her!

She lay stretched out on her side, her dishevelled hair bedraggled in the mud and wet, and her garments soaked with the rain. One arm, partially bared, was thrown out so that her head rested on it a little. There was no ghastly expression upon the face. There was not discoverable the least trace of Death's sudden triumph. The lips

were not yet colorless. The same brown tint stained her cheeks, and her eyes were closed as in a natural sleep.

I cannot describe the poor lover's distress. I cannot think of dwelling on the agony of the doting mother — an agony whose poignant stings, ere long, sent her to a premature grave.

Poor Charlotte looked never more natural than when she lay in her coffin on that quiet summer day, and the villagers thronged the church to get a last view of her whose face they would never behold again. All grieved at the loss, bewailing the stroke that had taken her away. But it was a long, a very long time before the bereaved lover could take the fearful lesson to his heart as Heaven had intended — before he could say, as sweet and gentle Alice Carey has said, —

“ Even for the dead I will not bind

My soul to grief ; death cannot long divide ;

For is it not as if the rose had climbed

My garden wall, and blossomed on the other side ? ”

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SICK ROOM AND ITS LESSONS.

MR. HUMPHREYS' family now numbered five, instead of four. There were three children, and the last was a girl. Mary Humphreys bade fair—so the good-natured flatterers of the village used to say—to rival, if not to excel, her mother in all her admirable qualities. And being the only girl, there cannot be much doubt that as much was made of her as she deserved. Yet running, or rather thrilling, through her dear parents' affection for her was a secret, silent fear, akin at times to trembling, lest the sickly breath might dry up her life, and the pale and shadowy hand beckon her away.

The boys grew wonderfully, attending the academy regularly. They promised to become ready scholars, and to supply all the future demands that might be made upon their faculties. Alfred was fast becoming a large boy. Sometimes his father thought seriously within himself respecting the life work to which he would at length be called. He thought tenderly, too, of his own youth, now passed

like a tinted dream — gone, like a morning dew, in the blaze of the working-day sun. He hoped that, whatever the child's earthly career, it would not be so unhappily — nay, so wretchedly — begun as was his own. Swift as had been the flight of the years, and though anxieties and cares had now begun to sprinkle the dark hair thinly with silver, his heart had nevertheless all the time retained its early freshness, and from its soil the refreshing dew had not yet all been dried up.

How suddenly trials come upon us! They do not always send their messengers before them to prepare their way. Not always do they knock at our doors before they enter our dwellings.

Mr. Humphreys' entire physical system was prostrated. Year in and year out, now, for a long and unbroken line of years, he had labored earnestly and with an unsparing hand in his Master's vineyard. What he had pictured to his mind as needful to be done, when he first entered on his work, he had faithfully tried to do. His whole heart and life were bound up in his calling. With heroic resolution he had determined to go through to the end.

And with such high purposes, constantly reaching farther forward to attain a loftier mark than ever he had set his eyes upon before, calling continually on God to support him through the labor, the anxiety, and the exhaustion, seeking, too, a blessing on all, he wore away those earlier and more vigorous years of his life, sparing nothing in the way of effort, never giving over, always vigilant, prayer-

ful, and filled with an abiding trust. This was the true character of his work, and this a faint outline of what, under Heaven, he was laboring eventually to compass. "Christ and him crucified" were all in all to him. The coming of his kingdom was the hope for which he strove, on which he lived, for which he was ready to sacrifice all earthly ease and peril all his earthly happiness.

It is not to be wondered at that sickness should, at some time or another, come ; and come it did.

A violent fever attacked him ; and he was thrown on a sick bed, helpless and prostrate.

At first the good village physician thought he might be successful in breaking it up before it began to run its riotous course in his veins ; but Doctor Jennings was not quite equal, with all his skill, to this task, whatever he might have been able to do in other cases. The disease, which was a typhus fever, had taken possession of the citadel ; and nothing but the most skilful treatment, with the blessing of Heaven, could force it from its strong position.

How the whole house grew suddenly changed ! There was a continual stillness all over it, as if Death were reigning. The doors were closed ; the curtains were down ; those who came in with assistance and sympathy were careful to step lightly, so that the very echoes of their tread were painful ; and conversation was conducted in such low tones, often little above whispers, that it gave the place an appearance of the deepest dejection and melancholy.

Poor Carrie! — her own mother gone now, too, — how sadly went she around the rooms, her countenance clouded with the deepest anxiety! Sometimes she stole away to weep, for her thoughts would stretch forward to the dread possibility of losing him she so dearly loved. But these lonely communings with her heart were invariably lightened with prayer; she pleaded — O, how earnestly! — for his restoration to health, if so might be the will of Heaven, and for his longer continuance here in his Lord's good work; and always a silvery cloud skirted the dark horizon of her fears, lifting the gloom as nothing else can do but prayer.

Nance Rivers, the negress, continued at Ingleside all the time with Mrs. Humphreys; and her services proved invaluable. Many and many a step did she save the afflicted wife, and her strength employed itself usefully when another's might have failed. And old Mrs. Grey came over very often, too, — every day, if she could, — proffering all the assistance she had it in her power to give; and she was one of the best of nurses, having a ready and gentle hand in a sick room. Jessie gladly released her from attendance upon herself; for Jessie had grown to be quite a young woman, and learned to do much for herself that she could never do before.

The visits of the doctor, daily, twice a day, thrice a day, — the air of sadness every where about the parsonage, even when that summer's sun shone most brilliantly, — the silence that reigned almost perpetually, — the hush of

voices every where within, — the muffled tread of feet, — the ominous whispers, one day making favorably for the sick man, and the next turning the full strength of their tide against him, — the boding shake of heads, and the long faces expressive of nothing but unrelieved melancholy, — they wore deeply, deeply into the heart of the devoted wife and mother, threatening even to undermine and exhaust the remaining strength on which she depended.

There he lay stretched on the bed, day after day, taking but little notice of those around him. His life, at moments, appeared to have vanished. Sometimes his breathing was so slight that it was scarcely sufficient to stain ever so little the mirror placed to his lips. For many days he was delirious, raving now like a madman, and now talking gently of those he loved as the apple of his eye. These were the days of real trial to the afflicted wife, for it appalled her heart to behold her beloved husband other than he had always been to her. She would stand and gaze at him for a long time, saying nothing to any one present, or exclaiming in sighs, drawn from the very depths of her heart, “Poor William! *dear* William!” And then immediately she would walk rapidly from the room, and go off by herself alone to weep and to pray again.

Sad indeed were these days. Days that had heretofore been lit with the glories of the summer now grew dark and gloomy, as if overhung with a funereal pall. From her broken sleep, at night, she would involuntarily start, to be at his bedside, and there betray all the intense anguish of

her anxiety for him who still lay unconscious of her presence or her love. It was this single thought, perhaps, that troubled her so deeply — that he had forgotten her, even for a single moment. And she trembled again, fearing lest he might in this state pass away, and so leave no further token of his recognition or remembrance.

It *is* a troublesome fear, for all of us who have dear friends to part with. When we separate, — they for heaven, while we remain behind, — we wish for nothing more earnestly than that we may be able to interpret their last words, their last pressure of our hand, nay, the very last look that lives and speaks to the end in their dying eyes. If we are denied this we are unhappy. There is something left for us to live upon all our lives thereafter. Into that one look, or word, or pressure we fondly concentrate all our tenderest memories of the departed, and measure and enjoy them every one with a single bounding thought. But to lose a friend when reason is unseated, and the eye is wild, and the tongue utters folly and madness, — O, it is to live an afterlife all of sorrow, to which none but they who themselves suffer have any idea that can be at all adequate.

They were all good to her in her affliction. Deacon Burroughs was continually at her hand, her chief support in the village. The boys he insisted on keeping at his own house, where they would give their mother no care. Was ever a better man than good Deacon Burroughs? — thoughtful and considerate as a woman, full of the tenderest

sympathies, all the time studying some way in which he might alleviate the poor wife's distress.

During the run of the fever — for Doctor Jennings had said, after it set in, that it must take its course — the pulpit was not regularly supplied, but religious exercises were conducted by the deacons. People thronged every Sunday morning about the meeting house, coming, many of them, from great distances, and talked in low voices of their minister, on whom the hand of Providence was laid so heavily. They exhausted every source of intelligence to fully understand the condition of his disease. And the women conferred with each other, before and between services, talking with sad and serious countenances, and wondering if he were, at this time of his usefulness, to be taken away. Even the children behaved with much more than their accustomed gravity, as if they felt, as well as the others, the heavy affliction of the parish.

The little meeting house for weeks wore a very sad air indeed, as if the stillness and solemnity of the parsonage, and even of the sick chamber, had extended their influences even here. The vacant pulpit spoke loudly of sorrow. The melancholy faces, too. And the gatherings around the doors, and in the porch, but one topic being brought forward all the time, — they confirmed the impression more than all else together. How anxiously they looked forward to the time when the lingering sickness would come to its crisis!

Mrs. Hawley rode over very frequently to see her old

friend, and to try to console and strengthen her in her trials. Those were most full and free interchanges of feeling that were made between them then. They talked together, wept together, and prayed together. The former labored to encourage the latter with some greater degree of hope, or, if not with the hope of her husband's convalescence, then with the blessed belief of his speedily entering into his rest. And so gentle was Carrie's friend all the time, and so handy in the sick room, and so considerate in every little action ! This sorrow, that strained the bond of their friendship, had the effect to make it stronger than ever. Mrs. Hawley insisted, too, on carrying little Mary back home with her at times, thinking that she might thus relieve the mother from some measure of her care. But the child was never kept away from home long. If, in God's wise decree, she was to lose her father, her mother wished her to be near to realize more fully the extent of her dread bereavement.

There was nothing that Mrs. Jennings was not ready and willing to do. She and several other ladies kept the parsonage all the time plentifully supplied with provisions, that there might be no noise from cooking in the midst of such an affliction. But very little, however, was eaten at that time at Ingleside. Grief was too poignant, anxiety was too much the master, to allow either thought or desire for food to have its natural claim.

Mr. Johnson's folks all came over to the village, and,

in their kind and generous way, offered such aid as they could give. They were willing to empty their dairy, to open all their storehouses, to do almost any thing, if by the means it was possible to avert the calamity that impended.

And Miss Buss was *very* kind; none could be more so. The natural goodness of her simple heart asserted itself now in a way peculiarly her own. A better watcher than she could not be found. Her skill at tending the sick seemed born with her, so easily did she go about doing what there was to be done. And she took it upon herself, while she was there, to relieve Mrs. Humphreys of the general charge of household matters, too. So readily were her directions given from day to day to Old Nance Rivers, Mrs. Humphreys saw that there was scarcely any thing left for her to do. Miss Buss's brother, Ned, now and then sent over one of his children to learn how Mr. Humphreys was, while she staid at the parsonage; and Mrs. Buss never omitted the opportunity to send by them some trifling token of her sympathetic regard. Unlearned as the simple people of our parish were in the mere formalities of life, their hearts were yet in the right place, and beating warmly always for those in suffering.

Even old Zack Wheaton, decrepit and deformed as he was, did not forget the claims of humanity, but made many a circuit round from his little retirement to the parsonage, anxious to know if the fever had "turned," and eager to suggest some trifling information for the relief of the sick

one. He ran on glibly about the many herbs he knew of that were all of them good for something in cases of sickness, and asked Mrs. Humphreys, and asked Miss Buss, if they had tried a certain kind of tea made of bark, or a peculiar sort of sirup decocted from some roots he mentioned, that would certainly prove cooling to their patient. He always left his honest blessing when he went away, and hoped from his heart that Mr. Humphreys would very soon be restored again.

And there were none who were backward in this emergency. Good Mr. Upton and his wife came over often; the widow Thorn was very attentive and feeling, and so were her daughters; Mr. Chauncey, — he whom Mr. Humphreys, years before, had rescued from jail in a season of anguish and despair, — it seemed as if his gratitude was in no wise yet spent. To none were the daily tidings of his situation a matter of indifference. Even Mr. Sanger, our lawyer, who had been exceedingly cold in his treatment of the clergyman of late, could not resist this sudden and earnest appeal to his humanity.

At length the time set for the limits of the disease had run its course. The day was waited for with great anxiety by Doctor Jennings; but O, with how much *greater* anxiety by the patient wife! How frequent and how fervent were her prayers that his wasted strength might yet be sufficient to withstand successfully the shock of the change!

He was very low on the night of that important day; he had, at no time, been any nearer Death's door. The

question of life or death was very nicely balanced; it would be like dividing a hair to separate the probabilities one way from the probabilities another. The house was now hushed like a tomb. Only a few remained near the bed, and they the most faithful and skilful of all. Doctor Jennings was there constantly. Mrs. Humphreys walked rapidly from one room to another, up stairs and down, fearfully calm and self-possessed, her countenance fixed firmly in one single expression.

His face was as the face of a dead man already. More like a corpse than a living being, he lay stretched on his couch, without the least motion, and almost without a sign of breathing. His eyes were closed. His mouth was partially open. It seemed as if the fires of the fever had burned all the life in his veins, and left only a heap of dead ashes. Prostration, utter prostration, succeeded to the unnatural tension of the system that had been kept up so long, and there seemed nothing left at last to live.

O, what a long and dreary night that was! The poor wife stood over her husband, and watched his breathing, continually putting down her ear to his lips. Now and then she raised her face quickly to Doctor Jennings, and whispered, in a tone of appalling fear, "Doctor! doctor! he's gone!" But the breathing would afterwards return again, leaving her face as pale as the sheet against which lay the sick one's hands. "Had you not better try and get some sleep?" the kind physician asked her. Sleep! No — no — no! Sleep at such a time as this? Could

any sirup medicine an overwrought heart like hers to sweet sleep, when such a crisis was upon it, pressing it down?

Finally his breath stopped entirely. It sank quite away.

The doctor quickly felt his pulse — placed his hand against his heart. The blood was still warm, but no motion was discoverable. “Is he dead? Is he gone?” cried the afflicted woman, springing forward to behold his features more closely. The physician made no reply. This only excited her the more; and it was difficult for the others present to pacify or compose her.

A powerful draught was instantly applied to the soles of his feet. If that had the least effect, there was yet room for hope; but if not, then all chances were gone. O, how eagerly watched the wife through it all, to know whether she was at this moment to become a widow!

In a very short time the patient drew up one of his feet in the bed, and made a low exclamation, as if the draughts hurt him. The doctor looked up at one of his assistants and involuntarily smiled. The wife caught that smile, and knew at a glance what it meant. “The wine!” called the doctor in a whisper. She stepped quickly for it, and fed her husband from her own hand. Life was still there. If by artificial means it could for a time be kept up, there was a possibility that it would finally recover itself.

The wife’s heart was a psalm of thanksgiving. She sat by the bedside, all the rest of that trying night, watching

narrowly every chance. If any thing remained to be done, she seemed to insist that no hand could do it as well as her own. Alternately she wept and smiled; and all the time she tried to feel deeply, deeply grateful for even this much of the radiance of a new hope.

When, at length, the bright sun tried to peep through the curtains, blinds, and clustering leaves at the windows, she had just betaken herself to rest, weary and overworn, yet buoyant with feelings that are sufficient to make earth any where a paradise. Inquiries came in, from all quarters, at a very early hour, respecting the situation of their beloved pastor. The intelligence that he was better, and that the fever had turned favorably, thrilled their hearts as no other intelligence just then could.

It was a long time, indeed, before the poor man had regained strength sufficient to sit up in bed, and longer still before he could be bolstered in his chair, resting his feet on a soft cricket placed to receive them. And it was with a delight that none but those who have thus suffered can appreciate that he first looked out of the window, and let his eyes run up and down the pleasant street. The light had to be shaded for him, for his vision was still very weak, and only for a few brief moments at a time could he be permitted to indulge himself. But it all seemed to him like a strange and bewildering dream. He could not help feeling that he had risen from the dead — as if the heavy doors of some gloomy sepulchre had swung slowly back, and he had emerged into this beautiful world

again. O, how much more beautiful than ever was it to him ! How high beat his heart with gratitude to Heaven for this unexpected deliverance ! How full was his soul with thoughts of praise — full even to overflowing — because he had been rescued from the very jaws of death, that his usefulness might be prolonged here yet a little while longer !

When he grew stronger, and was able, in the doctor's judgment, to receive his friends, they flocked in to him from every quarter. All wanted personally to attest their joy at his recovery. They brought every nice and rare thing that palate could crave or the ingenuity of house-keeper could devise. They put their horses at his service, as soon as he should be able to ride abroad, hoping he would not slight the kind offers of a single one of them.

But it was in the quiet bosom of his family that he most freely unveiled his feelings. How glad his heart was to collect around itself his loving and dependent brood again, and to them to recount his mercies, and with them to mingle his gratitude and devotion !

He was little more than the shadow of his former self when he entered his pulpit again ; yet he said that a new strength was given him while he was there. Glad enough were his people to welcome him back again into the sanctuary, and to mingle their praises with his for all the mercies and loving kindnesses of a common Father.

The trial proved a blessing ; for it confirmed friendship, drew out sympathy, challenged sober thoughtfulness, awakened the most wholesome and salutary fears, and, finally, lifted hearts higher and nearer to God than they had ever been carried before.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN OLD FRIEND IN A NEW CHARACTER.

THE stage drove up before the old inn of Mr. Thistle one autumn day, and from it alighted two men, one very much younger than the other. The younger seemed to be known here and there by those whom he passed on his way up the street ; but the elder was entirely a stranger. Yet, when he first touched the ground at Mr. Thistle's, he was overheard saying, in a half soliloquy, looking very sad while he spoke it, "Seems to me this place looks a little familiar. Seems to me I've been here before ; but I can't tell certain. My memory isn't what it was once. It fails me now and then, I find." And with these and such words he went groping his way about, until his younger companion called to tell him that he was ready to go up the street.

If he *had* ever been there before, it was, in all likelihood, very, very many years ago.

His eyes he kept very busy as he walked slowly up the street, gazing with much interest on all sides of him, not

less at the houses and the little yards and gardens than at the people themselves whom he met. He was a man, to appearance, quite advanced in years, and still bore the marks of good days, perhaps of better days; yet his dress did not argue either great poverty, nor did his manners outwardly suggest connection with vice or crime. Still there was an air of mystery about him. He naturally set you a-thinking that there was a story wrapped up in him.

As straight and unhesitatingly as if he were perfectly familiar with every little peculiarity of the town, went the young man forward till he reached the door of Mrs. Margaret Grey's cottage. There he stopped short.

"Here it is," said he, turning round upon his companion.

"Here!" was the reply. "This is *snug*, isn't it? All *very snug*!"

"She couldn't well be better provided for at present, you know," said the younger. "Perhaps the time *will come* when ——"

"O, I know, I know. Don't speak of that to me now! I know very well, boy, what *you* have done, and what *I haven't* done, too. Who can tell me about that better than I can tell myself? My conscience needs no pricking, I promise you."

"I do not stand ready to rebuke you at all," he returned; "that is no part of my duty. I only wanted to say to you that I have done, and am doing, the best I can, and hope all will end well finally."

"Certainly, certainly, boy. You *have* begun well; so you have. If I had kept on only as you have begun, you wouldn't find me left high and dry by the tide as I am at this day. No, indeed. But I'm impatient. What shall I say? What shall I do? How shall I act, now? To think it's been so long — so very long! I wonder if my voice will sound — But no, no, no! Come, let's go in. I can't bear this suspense."

The young man accordingly stepped to the door and knocked.

It was opened immediately; for Mrs. Grey had been looking through a pane, partially screened by the checked curtain, to discover, if possible, who the strangers were. Her first exclamation, on opening the door and seeing the face of the younger, was, —

"O!"

He hastily shook hands with her, and, without saying a word, passed in. The old man followed him, and the astonished Mrs. Grey involuntarily stood back to let him go by.

The younger went to the large chair that stood at the farther side of the little room, in which Jessie was sitting, and stooped down and kissed her.

"Who — who's that?" she managed to exclaim. "I *ought* to know, now. Who *is* it?"

"Don't you know *me*, Jessie?" said he.

"O, dear brother Herbert!" she exclaimed, throwing up her arms to embrace him; and she now kissed him affectionately in turn.

"Herbert," said she, reaching forth for a chair to seat him by her side, "why haven't you been to see me for so long? Do you think I am never lonely? Have you ever forgotten to think of me for a day?"

"Not for a single hour, dear Jessie. But matters have been so arranged that it was impossible for me to leave my place; and I am now looking forward so confidently to the day when I can have you with me all the time."

"O, brother!"

"But it is true. You do not think, I hope, that I am willing to toil through all the best of my days without some fixed purpose, do you? But, Jessie, you do not know I have brought some one with me."

"Whom, Herbert?"

The old man was standing, fixed in a sad revery. His eyes were upon the sweet girl, whose affectionate syllables rang like silvery chimes in his ears, and the thoughts that chased through his mind were of the most self-accusing character. A moisture dimmed his eyes, and his emotions already had well nigh got the mastery of him.

As soon as he heard the child ask that simple question, "Whom, Herbert?" in that gentle tone of hers, that touched all who ever had heard her, he sprang forward to her chair, and clasped her tenderly in his arms. Mrs. Grey wondered what it all could mean.

"My child! my dear child!" cried he, the tears coming to his eyes. "O, do but know your father, who has forgotten you so long! You cannot see me any more; can

you, Jessie? You never will know me again! What punishment — O, what punishment is this! I brought it all upon myself — I am alone to blame — it belongs to nobody but myself! Jessie, Jessie, *will* you call me ‘father’ once more, just as you used to do when I held you on my knee in our happy home, long and weary years ago? Will you let me call you ‘daughter,’ dear Jessie? Shall you drive me altogether out of your heart?”

He could not go on, but bowed his head on the neck of his child, who had risen, and now stood erect before him.

“Father,” said she, in a very soft and silvery voice, that was full of feeling, — “father, do you really feel as if I was your own child? Have you got a place still open for me in your heart? May I tell every one that I have got a father?”

Her own arms encircled the neck of the old man now, and she embraced him affectionately.

“Just to think of it!” said Mrs. Grey, in a whisper of astonishment.

“I can love you, father,” said Jessie again, “if you will only love me — if you will never, never go away and forget me again.”

“No, never, Jessie! never! Only take back your poor, wretched, repentant father into your heart!”

Herbert spoke to her in a low tone, hinting in a few words how miserable their parent had in reality become, and how gladly he had fallen in with him again.

“Let me put my hand on your face,” said Jessie to the

old man. "I want to see if you have changed since I was little."

He gently complied with her wish.

"Come, now," said she, after a moment, "let us all sit down and talk about it. We shall soon be able to build a bridge over the stream of time that has separated us. Come, father — come, Herbert. Mrs. Grey, now I want *you* to know my dear father, too. Father, you cannot know how kind Mrs. Grey has always been to me. I love her very dearly, I assure you."

And thus talking from out a warm and impulsive heart, and still holding on a little by her father, the sweet blind girl slowly resumed her seat, while the other two sat down, one on either side of her.

Both father and brother took a hand, and then she asked of the former to tell his story. It was a long one, but he began it resolutely. So overjoyed seemed he at last to meet the two lost ones again, and so excited with the tumult of his feelings to know of a truth that they were both comfortable and happy, that he wept as he talked, and smiled as he wept.

He told the whole story. He rehearsed faithfully all the incidents of years and years ago, that first impelled him so cruelly to desert his young children. He told them of the acuteness of his after sorrow; how like the sting of an adder it was; how it grew upon him, spreading its canker more and more over his nature; how he had striven for years to rid himself of the feeling; how he had

wandered and roamed here and there and every where; and how he was finally obliged to yield himself to the power that was fast dragging him down to the grave, and go on a pilgrimage during the remainder of 'his life in search of his children. It was really a pitiful story; it challenged their deepest sympathies; they had no hard thoughts for one whose punishment had already been so great.

He had finally found those of whom he had been in search. Here they were, both his own happy children. He could put his hands on each one of them now, and give them his dying blessing.

"But I only want to feel that I am forgiven," he pleaded.

"You are our father still," spake Jessie. "Can we forget that? If we have in some degree forgotten you, it is not because it was our choice."

"O, no — no! That is my punishment. To know that I am such a stranger to your hearts, — you, my own children! — and it was all an act for which I can blame no one but myself."

"Still," interrupted Herbert, "let us learn to think of you hereafter as a parent. All this is past. It ought to be forgotten now."

"Can it be *forgiven*?" he asked.

"Certainly; it is — it is," answered both the children.

"And I deserve it so little!" soliloquized the unhappy father. "So little!"

"Hereafter we will make an unbroken family," said Jessie, in her artless way. "Will we not, father?"

"I promise never, never to desert you again," he replied. "Only do not desert *me*—do not throw me out on the cold world *now*. I must die if I lose you again."

At that moment there was heard a knock at the door, and Mrs. Grey stepped to open it.

Mr. Humphreys was there. He had been visiting a portion of the parish at the farther end of the town, and concluded he would stop at Mrs. Grey's on his way home.

When he first entered the room he saluted Jessie affectionately, as was his custom, which salutation she was ready to return. Then he looked around him.

He just recognized Herbert, for he had seen him, from time to time, as he came to Brookboro' on visits to his sister; and the young man well remembered him. They shook each other's hands quite cordially, and the clergyman told him he was glad to see him once more.

"This is my father, sir," said Herbert, introducing Mr. Humphreys to the old man.

The clergyman looked at the stranger. As his eyes rested on his countenance, he saw that the latter was already gazing fixedly on himself. Indeed, had he been at any pains to observe it, he would have discovered that the old man's eyes had been fastened on him from the moment he entered the room.

As Mr. Humphreys extended his hand to him, he could

not help involuntarily scrutinizing his features, as if he sought the key to some secret or the solution of some perplexing problem.

"I must have seen you — no, it cannot — *yes*, I *must* have met you somewhere before," said Mr. Humphreys, his face lighting with intelligent sympathy.

"Yes, you have," said the old man.

It was not a sullen answer, whether it so seems or not. The old man appeared half stupefied, and the other half chagrined.

"I thought so, indeed," added the clergyman. "And now my first thoughts are confirmed since you spoke."

"Do *you* know good Mr. Humphreys, then, father?" broke out Jessie, in a voice of delight. "You must love him, father, for we all do that."

"Where can I have met with you before?" asked Mr. Humphreys, musing on it even as he put the question. "I feel certain I have, yet my memory is fresh no further."

"You have been a faithful pastor here for some time — have you not, sir?" asked the father.

"A great many years I have prayerfully labored to make my work acceptable."

"You remember the time of your first coming into this village, then?"

"Very well — very well."

"It was a cold, raw day in November."

"Yes, I remember it."

"And there was a stage load of us."

"Yes."

"Well, sir, and I was one of that little company of travellers."

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Humphreys, "I hardly recall ——"

"Think a minute, if you please, sir. Do you not recollect there was one man among the number who narrated, in a few short sentences, the history of his misfortunes? Do you not remember of his telling of his late wanderings, and how unhappy he was all the time, and how he didn't know where this wretchedness was to end? Can't you recall this?"

"I do — I do," said Mr. Humphreys, scrutinizing him now more closely than ever. "And are *you* the man? Did *you* first come with me to this town, and so long ago, and now here to call it all up again?"

"I certainly did, sir; and I remember full well how much I was interested in what you said; and, above all, I remember the warm blessing you gave me as we parted on that old piazza at the tavern below. I *thought* I recognized the spot when we first got out. I was not mistaken, I find."

Mr. Humphreys was lost in astonishment, although it was all highly colored with pleasure.

"Has my father really seen Mr. Humphreys before?" Jessie could not help exclaiming.

"I saw and knew him even before his own parish had looked on his face," answered the father.

He was the one who was a little intoxicated in the stage coach, on that November afternoon when Mr. Humphreys first set foot in Brookboro' ! It hardly seemed possible.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THANKSGIVING.

IN New England Thanksgiving is one of the red letter days.

There is no other time in the year to which old and young alike look forward with so much of pleasure, so much of hope, and such uniform vivacity of feeling, as to this hallowed point in the round of the rolling months. Children count with certainty on the best things the land has managed to produce for a year. Old age reckons up half sadly the long roll of Thanksgivings that have gone, while the sadness is merged and melted in a thought of the meetings and reunions that are just at hand.

There is a general movement made at that time every where. Those who have left the old family roof bethink themselves of the time when they shall get home again, and likewise of how they shall get there in due season to enter upon all the proper preliminaries of the festival. Many a busy mother is sedulously planning for weeks before for meeting the annual call with arrangements most suitable

for the occasion. And many and many a child, scattered here and there over the breadth of the land, counts up his joys as he has hitherto been counting up his marbles, eager for the day to arrive that shall usher him into the revered presence of his saintly grandparents.

Not less in quiet and pleasant Brookboro' than in other and more bustling towns was Thanksgiving made a great day of. Our parish never was behind in such a matter as this. The sturdy New England spirit was not more truly inherited by our men and women than was the honest old New England sentiment; and this Thanksgiving sentiment was one that sent down its roots deeply into our hearts, and spread its broad branches far and wide over the plane of our conduct. We were great sticklers for the ancient customs; of which customs one was to have as few holidays as possible, and another to make the annual Thanksgiving the chief of all.

The work of preparation usually began several days before *the* day, generally by the next Saturday preceding. Those of the farmers, or farmers' wives, in the town, who made it a point to raise poultry, — turkeys in particular, — killed numbers out of their flocks on that day, and on the Monday following, and brought them into the village for sale. The two stores invariably had a good and an early supply. And besides this, wagons laden with the yellow piles were driven about from door to door, so that every person could have a choice of his own.

It was a busy time with all. There were so many

provisions to be made for the absent ones. There was such an amount of baking and roasting to be done. Such a variety of labor was to be performed in the kitchens. So many pies to be made, and so many ingredients to mix, and so much indescribable and indiscriminate mingling of injunctions, advice, orders, and disappointments.

The boys had a belief, or half assumed they did, that the poultry had a vague prescience of their impending doom, and that many—the older heads among the flocks—opportunistically put themselves a little out of harm's way sometimes, without quite making their purpose apparent to their persecutors. Children, in the freshness of their budding sentimentality, amiably ascribe even to dumb creatures qualities of heart they are not known to possess on boiling or roasting, and fancy that turkeys and chickens instinctively feel the influence of a sedateness and sobriety not common to them at other parts of the year. Well might it be so, whether it is or not; for the decimation that usually goes on at this period among the lords and mistresses of the barn yards is on a scale sufficiently large to create a long reign of sadness afterwards.

The winters used to set in early in those days, so that Thanksgiving time came quite within the vestibule of the season. There was no holding back on the part of the weather, as if it were really too cold to begin—as one shivers and shrinks on the verge of taking a cold bath, though the necessity of taking it be imperative. About the return of this goodly festival, the ground had become

white with snow; and sometimes this coat of snow was a real, thick, shaggy coat of it, too. Or if this chanced to be delayed a few days longer, it was generally for the single reason that the air was too cold to *allow* it to snow; not because, as now, the genial drifts of the summer air had not yet all been wafted away.

Never wanted the clergyman's family for any of the peculiar luxuries in which our whole parish at this time indulged. They were sure to have more than they then needed, and certainly more than they would use. Yet it was a source of gratification to the people to know that, whatever else and how much soever else they did, they never forgot their pastor, but rather took care that his supplies even far exceeded his immediate demand.

So into the old parsonage came a fat turkey from Mr. Johnson; and a pair of spring chickens from Mr. Buss, always brought by his esteemed and indefatigable sister; and a nice sparerib, or a basket of sausages, from some other one who had very recently "killed his pork" for the winter; and still other things from still other people. They sent in their offerings hardly more freely before Thanksgiving than for the week after. Many had made more liberal calculations than were absolutely essential; and a good share of the surplus went, as a matter quite of course, to the minister.

The children at Ingleside, I think, were as happy as children could be any where; for the zest with which they enjoyed this day was heightened still more by the abiding

confidence they felt in the love of their parents and of the many material comforts of home. The very idea of Thanksgiving seems naturally based on the thought of home. If one has that to love, to look to, to go to, well may he be thankful, and thankful without stint or measure. And the home at Ingleside was surely such a one as few children could desire an improvement upon.

For the whole of the week, Alfred and his brother were amusing themselves with observing the large stocks of fowls that came through the village for sale. Their interest extended even to the friendly examination of the neighbors' barn yards, where they thoughtfully speculated on the weight of certain bipeds they considered doomed already, and tried vainly to get at some exact opinion of their probable profits. They surveyed with all vigilance the appearance of the carcasses in the stores, while they talked of the fat that lay on the breasts, and felt their very mouths water at a sight so extremely appetizing. There are hardly any such feelings again in afterlife, whether upon the subject of Thanksgiving or any other. Things are seen so through a colored atmosphere then,—the rosy atmosphere of youth,—that the wonder only is they keep up their pleasant illusions as long as they do. And about these time-honored customs and these revered festivals do the young sentiments cluster, freshly and freely, as they cannot be expected to gather again. In afterlife the reality becomes too palpable, and stands out too plainly defined in every irregularity of its outline. In afterlife the

colors of the charming picture gradually fall away from their first freshness, and the changing tints lose the power of their versatility, and even the groundwork gets scarred here and there, or rubbed off in places. No, there is no time to enjoy these sweet sentiments so fully as when the dew of youth is on us.

Our people were invariably good attendants on the services at the meeting house on Thanksgiving day, when the governor's proclamation was read by Mr. Humphreys from a very large sheet of paper, and a thoughtful exhortation was made them to offer the most devout gratitude to Heaven for the many mercies that were continued from one year to another. The little meeting house held a circle of truly thankful hearts at that time. There were many strange faces there, too, sometimes ; or faces, at least, that were not regularly to be seen in that place. The children who had gone out from under the paternal roof now gathered again about the dear old hearthstone ; and nothing seemed more natural—as it must likewise have been a self-imposed duty—to them than to enter the ancient sanctuary and listen to the words of gospel blessedness that fell from their former pastor's lips.

The house was apt to be a little cold at first on Thanksgiving day ; and the vacant pews, I am obliged to confess, wore a look quite nearly related to loneliness. But as the people began gradually to drop in, and faces long exiled began to renew their familiarity with the old spot, and the parishioners drew in black knots around the stoves, alter-

nately warming off their shivers and conversing with each other, the house grew more agreeable in its aspect, until finally they melted away one by one into the distant seats, and the clergyman came in with his pretty family so reverently, and the choir struck up an old tune they had had in contemplation for certainly several weeks before. The sermon never failed to satisfy us all. It was not mere speculation, nor all theory ; but it was composed of pious exhortations, based on a review of God's uniformly continued goodness, and uttered with an unction that had instant power to reach and work in all our hearts.

And it was after the services that there was a general mingling of our people again. We did not hurry at once from meeting to dinner, as if we had not half eaten our breakfasts, and felt that a sermon was as hungry a thing for us a school house is for children. It was not our custom to rush out pellmell to dinner, as if we thought the act of *eating* the larger part of the good old New England institution. But many and many a pleasant greeting was exchanged, not more between those who had not seen each other for the full year than between those whose intercourse was interrupted by only the lapse of a passing week. And many a story was told here and there ; and much pleasantry was indulged in ; and a great deal of good feeling circulated all around, that grew more and more contagious with each moment, and that finally sent all home to their dinners quite happy.

And when, at length, the feasts were set in so many

homes, glad faces and bright eyes encircling every board, there were pictures spread for any painter. These scenes were the index of the general sentiment of the people. Old and young, with their confusion of tongues, sat gathered about the same board. And there were such inviting sights upon the tables! — huge turkeys, distended to more than fulness, and much more than fatness, with what children every where call “stuffing;” and pairs of chickens flanking the turkeys on the great shallow platters; and deep chicken pies, in brown dishes, wherein, under cover of thick and crisp pastry, were intombed mangled corpses of young chickens, — here a leg, and there a wing, the neck and breast widely scattered, — the whole reeking in a pool of as rich gravy as could be made to ooze, by the process of baking, from the disjointed and simmering fragments.

And always, in large and well-ordered Thanksgiving arrangements, the fat plum pudding came after the pie, filling up the younger and more indiscreet eaters quite to the chin, so that they had naturally no room for so much as a taste of the pies that followed after. Yet they did not refuse pies, either; nothing daunted to attack the whole platoon of dishes that should present themselves in formidable array before them. They had room for the pies; but usually they were obliged to *make* it; they did not *find* it. It was a sort of bursting process, from which they wished themselves many a time free before its legitimate effects were fairly over.

Sometimes the minister and his family made calls around the parish on the older families, after dinner, prolonging their stay until late into the evening ; and at other times the nearer of his parishioners dropped in at Ingleside to chat pleasantly a while with Mr. Humphreys, and compare the present with the past, and talk over the prospects of the church, the parish, and the people. These were truly primitive customs, bearing as their proper fruit the most simple and innocent enjoyments. And we, who from this present point of time can call up those annual festivals in review, know best how deeply they sunk their secret influences into our natures, that will live like leaven so long as we are wanderers and probationers here on the earth.

Blessed old festival ! How many there are whose only regret is that you cannot come oftener than once a year !

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN AWAKENING.

THERE had been many seasons of unusual thoughtfulness, sobriety, and prayer before in our parish ; and, little by little, had humble and trusting disciples flocked to the foot of the cross. But there had been no special, no general and intense, manifestation of feeling as yet. The Dove of Peace was hovering continually over them, offering them the rest their hearts all prayed for at different times ; yet there was no concerted movement, no steady swell of the waters.

The dispensed word, accompanied by the fervent prayers of a zealous pastor, had done much, dropping its kindly influence on the hearts of all the listeners as dew is dropped on fields that have long lain fallow, and silently and steadily enriching them. It could not be said truly to have been lost or thrown away ; for somewhere in the life, either on the good ground or even among the thorns and briers, it sprang up, perhaps to bear fruit in abundance at the last, yet possibly to be soon choked out by the weeds

and the briers. But no labor is altogether in vain — especially ought this to be thought true in the case of the gospel ministry. To work with a sparing hand is to work without faith — as if some weak and wicked distrust had ingratiated itself into the soul that the things that are not seen are therefore the less true and eternal. The devoted herald of the gospel never rests, never wearies, never ceases his sacrifices. The gathering in of the harvest is the work of his Lord ; his own work is to scatter broadly the seed.

And so did Mr. Humphreys labor, and so had he labored for nearly a score of years, among our humble and simple people. Never had his hand paused. Never, even when disease and affliction threw their deep shadows across his life, did he falter, or hesitate, or look back. His faith was fervent, urging him continually forward. His energies grew still greater as he recalled the sufferings through which his Savior went for us all. He felt more and more strengthened, contemplating the vast field there was to be gone over and the hosts of faithful laborers that had been taken from their work to their reward. And if ever the human part asserted its weakness, and demanded more than the devoted spirit was willing to yield, in the midst of his conflicts he went on his knees to God, where he always obtained the strength needed to give him the final victory.

Yet with all this constant and prayerful labor, no great and uniform interest had as yet been betrayed. If believers were added, it was slowly and in few numbers at a

time. The stream of comers was not always a steady one either. Now it was stronger, and now its force abated. Sometimes they came to ask what they should do to be saved, as if the spark that had kindled must ere long break out in a general conflagration. But it did not. Yet Mr. Humphreys himself did not despond or despair. He left all with the pleasure of the Lord. The fulness of the promise he believed in good time he should see.

There had been for some time rather more interest than common displayed, in matters of religious import, at the usual Friday evening conference meetings, and some of the younger members of the parish were especially concerned. The first effect of this interest was to procure much larger attendances upon these weekly meetings than usual, calling in people from all the village realms. The next natural result was to secure the appointment of these meetings still more frequently — at first, twice a week, instead of but once. And, finally, they were held every evening for many weeks together.

Sometimes Mr. Humphreys attended on them, but not always; yet when he could not go himself, he sent his wife, that she might lift up her voice in prayer with the rest. Now they were held at one house, and now at another, and sometimes at the school house, when the room was filled with anxious souls to overflowing. Through the days the coming evenings were joyfully looked forward to as seasons of spiritual refreshment and progression towards heaven. Minds that had not thought seriously of religion

and of salvation before were now deeply exercised to know the way and the life, and to seek to enter therein. Persons who had hitherto lived in a sort of torpid state of heart, seeming neither to receive nor to reject as living truths the great doctrines of Christ's religion, now awakened from the sleep of years and began to inquire in all seriousness what they should do to be saved.

The prayer meetings were scenes of the highest interest. It was a blessed feeling to know that people were pausing, in the midst of their worldly pursuits, to consult first for their greatest good both towards their Creator and themselves. The heart could not help yearning with the deepest sympathy when the eyes witnessed such eager and earnest strivings all around it after the riches of the true grace that cometh only from Heaven. It was sweet to the converted soul to feel that so many others were to be made final partakers of its own joy. And so all worked, and fasted, and prayed, and talked together, while God, as beforetime promised, was certainly in the midst of them.

On one of these interesting occasions, after Mr. Humphreys had led in the conduct of the services, Mr. Upton arose, and in simple words, full of meaning and of life, expressed his earnest longing for the salvation that needeth not to be repented of. He had led an exemplary life hitherto—that is, as men's judgments generally go; he had “spoken the truth from his heart” always; he had “used no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbor, and had not slandered his neighbor;” yet he knew

and he felt that he was far, very far, from grace. In the blaze of the gospel light his sins were as scarlet. He saw, through God's grace, that there was nothing good in him. Unaided of Heaven, he was powerless to do any thing. But now he wished to come out from the world and be separate; to give up the false allurements and the hollow pleasures of worldliness, and set himself up a more acceptable and perfect offering to the Lord, whose sacrifice for such as he had been so great.

The earnestness and perfect candor of his manner, together with the deep meaning of his heart's agonizing confession, had an effect on the minds that heard him that even they themselves could not have fully foreseen. Mr. Upton was an upright man, as much so as any man in the village; and he was a thinking man besides. Whatever he said, whether with reference to his feelings or his convictions, carried great weight with it. And if his speech had its proper influence on ordinary occasions and concerning topics of the commonest interest, it must be at once understood how profound was the feeling created by his plain and earnest confession respecting matters that pertained to the eternal life and welfare of the soul, that reached far forward from the things of time to those that were closely interwoven with our everlasting interests.

After him one and another rose freely, expanding upon what had been said already, and asking the prayers of the rest for their souls' good. Mouths that had for years and years been stopped now were suddenly opened, as by some

miraculous agency. They none of them took thought beforehand what they were to speak, or how they were to address themselves to the others; but language was abundantly given them at the needed moment, language such as moved hearts that had been asleep^a and indifferent for years. The fire was burning. Its heat was growing steady continually. It was contagious now, and kindled hearts hitherto without warmth at all.

Many were the converts all through the town. Old and young joined in the universal inquiry, "What shall we do to be saved?" Secular business seemed some days to be entirely suspended, that nothing might interrupt the progress of the great work going on. The pupils in the academy had frequent meetings among themselves for exhortation and prayer, both before school and after. The ladies conferred with each other on afternoons, and labored zealously to help the work, under God, along. Men stopped from their dealings and their bargains, and talked seriously of the cause that had enlisted all hearts and promised to be so glorified in their midst.

Thus surrounded, — hungry souls on every side, eager to partake of the bread of life, — Mr. Humphreys was sustained by an unseen hand to perform an amount of labor to which he would not ordinarily have thought himself adequate. Early and late, in season and out, when the flesh was weak though the spirit grew strong, he wrought for and with his little flock. His heart yearned towards them as a shepherd's to the very least and weakest of all

his yearnings. He wrestled with God in prayer, beseeching that his Spirit might be poured out abundantly over his people, and that they might all be called of God from the least unto the greatest.

Nor was he less zealous and faithful in his Sunday sermons. They cost him a great deal of prayer and a great deal of laborious study. His whole soul was aroused to preach the perfect and pure word. He hung long on his golden thoughts of heaven, till they blazed over his heart and over the hearts of his hearers like lines of heavenly fire. And his exhortations, too, grew very earnest and feeling. They were not more vehement than ordinarily, but they seemed to act with a far deeper life on the consciences of his people. Often and often were sobs to be heard about that little church, as he pictured to them the dying love of the Savior, the great shame he despised for us and willingly endured, and his unspeakable agonies; and then, as he asked them if they were not willing to give such a Friend at least their hearts, and to try and live as if their love for him was higher, and deeper, and vaster than any other love, their lips almost moved to answer him aloud, "Yes, yes — we can."

Not the least of Mr. Humphreys' sources of satisfaction, at that time, was to be found in the fact that his eldest son, Alfred, had promised repentance, and had become hopefully pious. This was cause of the highest joy. The thankful father's heart rejoiced as none but the heart of a pious father can. He blessed God for his great kindness,

while he prayed that it might always find him its worthy recipient. And the fact inspired him naturally to still more arduous exertions, as if his heart could hardly be grateful enough.

Throughout the whole of this gracious work of God, Deacon Burroughs had been Mr. Humphreys' greatest earthly friend. With him he had repeatedly taken counsel, and with him he had often gone to God in prayer. The deacon's own child, too, Lucy, — now the wife of Mr. Joseph Bard, — had given evidences of a change of heart, which tended to bring the matter still nearer home to her father's feelings; and he labored strenuously, trusting to God to give the increase in his own good time and pleasure.

The work prospered long. The result of this special awakening was the gathering of many souls into the fold of Christ. Its happy influence was seen and acknowledged throughout the village, in the business pursuits and the social relations. It really seemed as if a change had come over every thing. The place looked like a little paradise. And for some time this happy state existed. The heart of the people had been purified and exalted.

Mr. Humphreys had studied nothing so much as discretion and the convictions of an enlightened Christian judgment in guiding the movement that had been begun, and religiously thought that it was better to let the judgment keep pace with the feelings than that the latter should run away with the former. It was on this account that he

watched anxiously and prayed continually that no influences might creep into the progress of this work but those that were of Heaven. Rather than have it proceed under false and hollow incitements, he would not have it go on at all. And in this opinion he was certainly supported by Deacon Burroughs, and supported with much strenuousness.

But there was now a different spirit at work, not soberly intending or desiring to overthrow what had already been built up on so enduring a structure, but refusing to take into its consideration the exact character of all the influences that at this time asserted their claim. It was a spirit that did not stop to make clear and truthful discriminations, but hastily coalesced with the first impulses that presented themselves. It almost undertook to assert that evil itself might be done that good might come.

Some of the parish wished the work carried out rather farther than naturally, aided by good men's prayers and fastings, it would itself go. They were for *pushing* the matter, when such aid must be certain finally to react with lasting injury against the cause they support. It started involuntarily the thought of "zeal without knowledge," and made one stop and ponder seriously whither the road would at length conduct him.

Mr. Humphreys felt called upon to give a gentle check to the progress of this spirit, telling his parishioners that more was wrought by faith than by fanaticism. To the extreme lengths to which some of the less thoughtful and

experienced were gradually tending, he himself felt that he could not go ; and if not himself, then he felt it his additional duty to warn others against the indiscretion.

Those whose hearts have been carried through these deeply interesting seasons will not need to have explained to them in detail the whole of my meaning. They are perfectly familiar with the fears that abound at such times, and abound not without much reason. It is ever a trying time for the anxious and farseeing souls whose religious views and experiences are sufficiently large to entitle their judgment to the greatest consideration.

Some were fanned by the heat of new and foreign motives. Some felt the workings of strange influences. Some looked forward for a harvest of their own gathering simply, virtually denying or setting aside the grace and the power of Him who is able and willing to gather all souls in his granary. And their influence spread like a circle in calm water. It was easy to cast the stone, and it was easy to begin the movement ; but it was not so easy to tell where the circle or where the movement would end.

The favor of Deacon Congdon was obtained, and this was a great deal. He came forward with views directly the opposite of those enunciated by Mr. Humphreys and Deacon Burroughs as the mouthpiece of the opposite party. Yet the discreet clergyman was as firm in his conviction as he was discreet. Without being rash or hasty, he was decided.

So the wrong feeling sprung up. Its roots struck out

into soil made ready for their sustenance. They who had of old time ever been the closest friends and sympathizers with their devoted pastor now admitted thoughts to their hearts that had never found audience there before. Distrust grew and strange feelings rankled. The work that was begun with such zeal, and conducted with such judicious fervor, ended at last in what was farthest from the thoughts, wishes, or intentions of any.

Yet Mr. Humphreys believed he was right, and trusted to God to sustain him. Even if *all* earthly friends should desert him, he was resolved not to bring the cause of Christ into reproach. He would never defile the sacred vessels that had been placed in his keeping. He would walk humbly, following only the light that shone clearly in his earthly path.

CHAPTER XXX.

BROOKBORO' WITH ADDITIONS.

SOMETIMES a quiet little town, that has not felt the ondriving wave of innovation since its grass-bordered streets were first laid out, manages to keep its character for *staidness* unsullied for many and many a generation. It grows, but so gradually as to excite no remark ; least of all, any comparisons. The fat farms that lie spread out on every hand yield just about so much each year. The cattle work, grow fat, are slaughtered, and give place to others. Men turn whiteheaded, and give over the hard work to the younger ; and boys come up like weeds, astonishing even their own friends, and crowding their elders one by one off the stage.

The events in rural communities are of so peaceful a nature, and so little of excitement is naturally interwoven with their history, that they hardly suffice at all times to interest strangers, even if set forth with much art in their description. They were generally of this nature in pleasant old Brookboro'. The mere worldling would see nothing

to interest him. Those highly-seasoned ingredients that enter into the food that alone can satisfy his craving appetite would be missed here. The stimulating influences were not to be found. Yet that does not by any means argue that, to a healthy heart, even such little events as transpired in Brookboro' may not have an interest. The history of human hearts is the same every where; no matter what the sky, where the soil, or how involved the circumstances. Hope is the same in all alike; and so is fear, and ambition, and passion. So that the reader whose nature is thoroughly furnished will pick up in abundance materials for enjoyment even within the precincts of a country village miles and miles away from the reach of metropolitan influences.

Brookboro' had held its own, as the current phrase is, for many and many a year. Its head had got to be really reverend with the marks of time. There were many of the farmers round about who had grown up with it almost, their early boyhood reaching far back towards the infancy of the village, but not quite there. It had always worn the name of being a pleasant and enlightened little place, whose people dwelt together in as much harmony as those of any other. Strangers who wandered off the great roads of travel, and found their way into our secluded nook, never failed to carry off the most agreeable impressions of us all — of our houses and those who inhabited them. When I think of it at this day, I am quite driven to wonder why it was we were not made a place of summer resort.

Possibly, however, it was for the simple reason that people did not choose to "resort" much any where in those days. The movement is of very recent origin, so far as it is a general one.

Years ago, during the reign of the new spirit that was then stalking abroad over New England, and that sent its spies and emissaries every where, a little company of strangers came to examine the "water privilege" at the southerly end of the town. It created no little excitement through the village and indeed throughout our entire borders. There was a new project on foot. The power that we had never thought of chaining, that it might be made to do its natural share of work in the world, was examined, and discussed, and computed, and calculated upon, till some of us felt fairly ashamed that we had suffered such grand advantages to lie unimproved so long.

Great things were promised; and our village rubbed its eyes and awoke. Men, women, and children seemed to take a fair start anew.

The first gratifying intelligence was that a company of gentlemen, styling themselves in mercantile parlance "Messrs. Belden, Brown, & Co.," had obtained a refusal of the site for a mill at the lower part of the town, and would break ground for their buildings just as soon as their contract was satisfactorily adjusted.

Now speculation began in good earnest. I do not mean speculation in matters of marketable value, but in matters of opinion. Every one at once planned a palace for his

residence, and thought the "new mills" would bring along the wealth, and distribute it freely and equally. Some speculated on the great good there would be done for all the general interests of the town, and what a grand thing it would be for a market. It would be close at their elbow now. Some attempted to foresee, and actually thought they did foresee, a spacious hotel going up instantaneously, and crowds of strangers all at once blocking up the avenues and passages. Some erected castles of one kind in their brain, and some of another. All were busy at castle building.

There was no withstanding the force of the popular current so soon as it fairly set in. There was nothing more preposterous than to think of damming it up or turning it aside. It would take the course of its own natural channel. If people chose to become little less than monomaniacs, there was no other way but to suffer them to act out their disorder at discretion. It would be likely best to cure itself.

One would hardly have imagined, however, looking at the subject soberly, that such plain, honest, matter-of-fact men as our farmers would so readily have been drawn into this giddy maelstrom. It was a little astonishing that they who had all their lives fought bravely the battle against any and all innovation should, at this time, yield so quietly, so without even a protest or a murmur, at the firing of the very first gun on the side of the enemy. It looked not altogether unlike treason. In one aspect it *was* treason.

But the ways of human nature are almost past finding out. The human heart is sometimes only a riddle. Human feelings, like human calculations, are as unstable as water.

In Mr. Bard and son's store men gathered regularly, and so they did at Mr. Plimton's. They perched themselves skilfully on the smooth-worn counters, and there sat complacently through the long evenings. Nothing was talked of but the "new mills." It was the topic that had hungrily swallowed up for the time all others. Even boys freely put their questions, and had fully matured their opinions. To no classes or ages was the discussion confined. All had a chance at it alike.

Some of the farmers who dropped in at the stores to compare views, or to elicit the very latest item of speculation, talked grandly of what they would make by it all. They could go to work now and raise pigs and poultry in good earnest. There would be little fear that the surplus of their raising would find a ready sale. Some spoke of it as really affecting the question of corn, as if the supplies demanded in consequence of the erection of these mills would abundantly repay them for the venture of stocking down double or treble the former amount of land in Indian corn. Eggs would be in demand, too — yes, people could not well live without eggs. And the call for butter would be a great deal louder cry than they had ever heard before. And so for cheese. And, in fact, so it would be to the end of the chapter.

Such a new life as would all at once dawn upon them! Such a great impetus as would instantly be communicated to every industrial interest! So much the oftener would they be obliged to drive into the village, and so much the oftener come in pleasant contact with their acquaintance and friends! If, as they seriously looked at it, there was *any* drawback to the picture, it was because they would find their attention a little distracted from purely agricultural avocations, and more and more diverted into the channels of trade. But they hoped this would regulate itself. They stopped not to deal very minutely in calculations, but strode forward after the most gigantic and colossal styles. They were fairly inoculated with a disease they had never known before; and the only course was to suffer it to have its natural run, without making any attempts to break it up.

And so the stone dam at length came to be built over the little river, at the point where for so many years it had defied the curb and bit, and its pellucid waters grew gradually black with mud. Where the troutlet once leaped now burrowed the speckled mud turtle, diving down into the slimy bosom of the sediment just as soon as the sound of feet were any where to be heard. Where once the brilliant cardinal flowers displayed their blood-red spires up and down the river, on the shores and between the crevices of the rocks, the coarse brake now began to spread densely, throwing out its long, serrated leaves, as if it would cover every thing with their green mantle. The lilypad floated

its broad, leathery leaves on the surface of the pond ; and yellow flowers, rank and gaudy, served for cheap-looking stars over the bosom of the sluggish water.

The life, and animation, and soul of the little stream were all gone together. To be sure, it atoned properly for its long life of idleness by bravely putting its shoulder now to the wheel and turning out piles of wares every day ; but this sense of *utility* somehow conflicted strangely with the old sense of *beauty*. It was a difficult thing to reconcile them.

Undine left the waters, and took away her train with her. All the sweet and endeared associations melted. The great stone dam kept up its steady drum and roar ; but it was by no means the music-like, liquid singing that the little river once made over the rocks, and under the shores, and away through the arches of the overhanging trees. Where before slept the very heart of the shadows, stiff and unsightly stumps were now stuck about, like the stone posts of the Giants' Causeway ; and among the stumps, at low water, innumerable snails crawled slowly in the bed of the mud, and staring, greeneyed frogs twanged their deep-sounding bass, and speckled turtle hid themselves from sight.

It seemed really a wrong thing, this devastation of a spot that had so long worn its modest renown for beauty. It might easily be excused on the plea of necessity and the promise of a greater usefulness ; yet there were many hearts even in quiet old Brookboro' that could not bring

themselves to the reality without compunctions and severe regrets.

After this beginning was fairly made, the workmen fell to on the buildings. The main edifice was of stone ; and it required not only all the force brought to the spot from out of town, but likewise much of the disposable force of the town itself, to push on the work to rapid completion. There were several buildings to be erected besides the main one ; and all helped prolong the labor. And carpenters were busy, too, upon the dwellings. There were to be several of them, not only for the families of the mill owners, but for the operatives likewise ; and so all along between that point and the village proper little dwellings dotted the landscape and lined the road.

Day after day, and week after week, and month after month there went up on the air one continual sound of "haw" and "gee," of hammer and plane, of hod carriers and masons, shovel and trowel. The spot wore the look of a beehive. The owners were continually about the grounds, directing and overseeing, and still laboring to carry to a greater degree of perfection the plans originally devised. They always produced no inconsiderable stir when they came up into the village, having the faculty of filling the stores at which they called with a host of eagerly inquiring men.

Finally the work, or at least the main part of it, was done. Brookboro' had been kept in a state of great ex-

citement for now nearly two years. It made one who had ever been in town think of the haste and anxiety displayed at about two o'clock on 'Change. But Brookboro' seemed to become more accustomed to it finally, and perhaps at length grew to think nothing of it at all. Yet it did turn our heads a little, and elevated our feelings of self-sufficiency, and tempted us to speak rather boastingly in the presence of our friends from other towns. We were subject to be led of vanity quite as much as people the world over. The peculiarity, perhaps, had not shown itself so plainly before, because there existed no sufficient temptation.

At least a dozen new families came into that part of the town at once, all dependent on the mills for their subsistence. Some of them were better off than others in point of pecuniary possessions; but all wrought in the same great establishment of industry. And in good time these few families received accessions to their number; so that there must have finally been at least twenty of them together.

Living in the heart and centre of their business occupations were the families of the proprietors likewise. They were people of high respectability and superior intelligence, especially the world's intelligence. They looked forward with certainty to the accumulation of ample fortunes, and accordingly felt themselves prospectively a little in advance of the honest and simple people of our parish.

Mrs. Belden was what we all called at once a "smart" woman, especially "for business." She professed to be independent of every body. She was very certain, at least, that we at the village could teach her nothing; and she did not mean to put herself in our way for instruction. I do not know what else to call it, unless I am allowed to call it "upstartishness;" for I am quite sure she was a good deal given to playing off her airs in our sight, and did not spare even such a sacred day as Sunday for carrying out her purpose.

Mrs. Brown was after the same pattern, too, in very many points; though in others she was far her superior. Coming from a bustling place into so deep a retirement as, for good reasons, they had selected, Mrs. Brown could not help feeling that *her* past superior advantages were, as matter of course, to be set down in the account as *our* special demerit and partial disgrace. Not so, however, thought we; certainly not so thought all of us.

It was plain enough that there were those in Brookboro' who hastened to make their salams to the new comers, and that some of them solicited their acquaintance on terms not at all compatible with true social equality. There were found some who did not stand long to adjust nice questions of self-respect or dignity, but sacrificed voluntarily all their previous standing for the single boon of admission to the new circle.

And pretty soon this new circle began to assert its own peculiar influence and authority. The leading families from the locality of the mills hired the most conspicuous seats in the meeting house, and took it upon themselves to pass their judgments freely on all around them. The sermons hardly escaped their keenedged criticism; and the singing was favored no more. People who had lived on for years there, happy in the simple enjoyments our little church choir so bountifully dispensed, now for the first time in their lives found that the singing was "just no singing at all." Mr. Humphreys, too, preached plainly and practically; and his warnings, and exhortations, and frequent appeals were truly earnest in the cause he had espoused for his life. But these strangers pretended to be not altogether *satisfied* with him. He was a little past their *fashions*. They hinted ominously of the possibility of better ministers being in the field. Then they whispered of calculations that had been made among them for the erection of a new church, that should be located nearer their part of the town.

These rumors grew; they were in many mouths. They came up into the village itself, and walked boldly, at last, through the street.

And there were some who still felt a little disaffected towards Mr. Humphreys because of his judgment in matters pertaining to the revival. They had dropped in a wedge between him and their early affections; and now

the influence of the people from the mills was quite sufficient to drive that wedge still farther into the cleft. And when distrust is sown it springs up abundantly ; and other weeds come up with it, too.

But the history will finally explain itself.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE OLD PARSONAGE.

SINCE the time when Mr. Humphreys first went over to look about the parsonage, on that delicious morning in spring, the spot had made a great improvement; and since the time when first he took his youthful wife there, and they planned so enthusiastically together concerning the grounds, marvellous changes had been made and countless forms of beauty had sprung up.

“It’s hardly possible for me to believe dear old Ingle-side *was* what it once was,” said the clergyman, while he sat on his porch, with his entire family gathered around him, one evening in June. “I cannot picture it any thing different from what it is at this moment.”

“If people generally would only take a little more pains, have a little more thought, regard but a trifle more the very first principles of taste, I fancy the changes about many a dwelling, now rude and uninviting, would be quite as much a subject of wonder as this. The first point is, to cultivate the sense of beauty we all have.”

"Yes; and that is to win the whole battle. In these matters, I find that the difficulty lies in taking *the first step*. Whoever takes that will be sure to take the next; and then the way is clear enough."

"And some never do that."

"No; they have no inducements; or they *think*, at least, they have none."

"Which I very much doubt," interrupted Mrs. Humphreys. "All feel a natural love for beauty; they pay respect to it; their actions and their words confess to the depth of the feeling."

"Well, then, this very inclination of the soul to objects of beauty is an inducement of itself; and no very mean one, either. Who can deny it?"

"It seems so, certainly."

"Just look at some of the farm houses in this town," went on Mr. Humphreys. "There they stand, just as they stood the day when the carpenter gathered up his tools and left them for finished. I do not make the least objection to their *standing*, nor to their standing in exactly the spot they first occupied; that is not the point. But I *do* say, as I certainly think, that improvements might have been going on since that long-ago time. The places might have added a little to their beauty in all that period."

"That, indeed," said Mrs. Humphreys, acquiescingly.

"Home is not simply a house. A roof and a dry room do not comprise the whole matter. *The heart* must be concerned, and concerned more than any thing else; and how much

more deeply are its best and richest feelings moved when there is every thing to excite them all ! You may say truly that there is nothing in particular in a tree, or a shrub, or a vine worthy of calling forth such manifestations of feeling. There is not ; although a beautiful tree, or a graceful shrub, or a luxuriant vine is an object well calculated to challenge our regard. Yet when these things are made to intertwine themselves around places we love as we naturally love home, the thoughts of them likewise intertwine themselves around our tenderest thoughts of home. They grow into our very hearts. We clothe them with our feelings just as much as we clothe home itself with them. And they all come at last to form but one endeared picture."

The evening was very fine, with a round moon rising in the east that threw down latticed shadows across the floor of the little porch at their feet. Nothing could be more deliciously fragrant than the atmosphere, laden with drifting perfumes that slowly sailed hither and thither on every changing current. Especially was the odor from the lilac bushes, at the corner of the house, delightful. It seemed as if it were newly crushed out from the purple and pink flowers that adorned the clumps of green every where in massive spiked bunches, and were scattered lavishly in all directions.

The front yard, that lay between the house and the gate, was quite all they had once hoped to make it, and perhaps a little more. The grass, that made the soft and welcome carpeting for their own and their children's feet, could 'by

no possibility be fresher or greener. The fir, and pine, and spruce trees Mr. Humphreys had with his own hand set out had grown to be stout and sinewy, and in the silvery light of this moon looked as if the darker shadows were brooding within their abundant branches. Just a little moisture, like early dew, glistened over the grass blades, making a round little moon in every drop. The larger fruit trees, that had of late years forced themselves along, were dressed out in splendid and luxuriant liveries of leaves, among which cherries and plums were slowly beginning to mature; and the shadows they made across the grass and upon the side of the house quite inspired the heart with an idea of companionship.

"This is beautiful," exclaimed Mr. Humphreys, his sensitive soul enjoying it all with high ardor. "Beautiful indeed! I cannot help repeating the Scripture words of praise at such a season and such an hour as this: 'He hath made every thing beautiful in its time.'"

"Could *money* purchase delights such as this?" said Mrs. Humphreys, looking straight into the face of the moon.

"No money could. These secret and sweet delights are not to be trafficked in. Only the rightly-attuned heart and the properly-cultivated nature can enjoy them. And such may enjoy them freely. And that brings up to me again a thought or a fancy I have often had: Why am not I as much an owner of lands and estates every where as they who hold only the title deeds? The proprietors can pro-

duce their authority for possession, I know; but what *is* their possession?"

"The privilege of hoeing, and digging, and ploughing in their land," answered his wife.

"Yes, and that is quite all. The owner may have the fruits of his labor, for to them he is entitled. They feed his appetites. But he is not therefore alone privileged to enjoy the charming *landscapes* they make. He is not peculiarly entitled to the right of enjoying the rich effects of sunshine and shadow, as they chase each other across his outstretched fields. He may, if you please, assert his *right* in even a matter like this; but what if he is not able to *enjoy*? What if he has no cultivation of soul? Then of what value is his possession? Of just none at all."

The children were giving excellent attention.

"Now," said their father, "though I do not happen to own myself a rood of land back on those hills, yet I suppose they are capable of affording me quite as much enjoyment as they do some of the owners of that land, and perhaps more. I may stroll over them in the flush of the early morning or the glow of the gorgeous sunset. There is nothing to hinder me, for I injure nothing and I carry away nothing. I do not have to go through the toil and anxiety, either, of cultivating that land, nor of striving, year in and year out, to make its produce equal what I lay out upon it. All this part of its care — the care that invariably goes with the ownership — I am free from. Yet I can enjoy all the rich scenery I find there. I am not

debarred the privilege of seeing delightful pictures, such as only the hand of the Almighty can make, wherever I may be able to find them. No man can prevent me, be he owner or not. What I possess is property that all souls may hold in common. It is as free as the sunlight, as the air we breathe, as the sky we look dreamily into. A man without a dollar can own it all ; but he must have sensibilities such as fit him to enjoy it, or his property becomes of no sort of value to him."

"It is strange," observed his wife, "how few there are, comparatively, who think of these things ; as if the whole of life were compassed in getting a sufficiency for the real necessities of the body."

"So it is strange. But it will continue to be so just as long as men delude themselves in running this swift and breathless race after *money*. Only money — nothing but money ! — the standard, the measure, the limit of all things. Moral character laid down in the dirt by the side of it, and stretched or shortened until it is made to bear some adequate and convenient proportion. The most sacred feelings desecrated by its contact. The sense of beauty entirely deadened by its merely metallic glitter. The eyes of the soul blinded by its flashing light. It is strange, truly."

"But yet the better principles are *alive* ; men are to be found here and there who know how to cherish them, and know full well what they are worth, too."

"O, yes ; but these persons are not strong enough yet

in numbers to wield an influence that shall leaven the mass. We must be patient. These things mature with time. And I have full faith to believe that, as these natures of ours are made and gifted, men will eventually have their inner eyes opened. These gorgeous sights are by no means to be thrown away. They were spread out for some good purpose. They were intended to help on the gracious work of the Creator of all, and fill us more and more with overflowing love for him. They do not add at all to his happiness or his glory; but he has stretched them out *for us*, as if he were unrolling a vast panorama before us. They are all for our own eyes, and their high influences are for our hearts. And he who has learned their true use, and knows how to receive their influences rightly into his nature, is already far in advance of his fellows in at least *one* branch of his moral education. If a man refines his tastes he has certainly *begun* the work of reformation, although I will not pretend to say he has begun as and where he should. Yet if he goes forward even this single step, he cannot go backwards again. The faculty of unlearning what is so native to its inborn propensities the human heart hardly possesses. What it has got it grasps tightly, it keeps. Other influences may for a time here overlies and incrust these refined and lofty influences; but still the fires of the first feeling will now and then break out through all this rubbish, and jet up into the light with all the glory of a brilliant flame. And this flame heats the heart wonderfully all through the life. If duty immures

one within close walls, where not so much as a glimpse of natural beauty is to be found to feed the hungry heart, still this very appetite within prevents the drudgery of daily life from palling on the nature. It will present your mind with beautiful pictures when to the eye all seems bare and hard. It is a half angel in our bosoms, and all the time it is pointing with its slender finger upward to God."

If a stranger had passed along the village street that evening, the moon now risen up into the sky, and let his eyes fall on that happy group thus gathered on the old parsonage porch, he would have thought it a picture worth treasuring in his heart for a long time. If Mr. Humphreys himself experienced such a rapturous glow of feeling while sitting beneath the shadow of the vine and the tree his own hand had planted, and could communicate any share of it by his earnest words to the little group he loved, how much more would the outward and casual beholder be enchanted with its pictured dream of home blessedness, and hope himself some time to drift into just such a sweet and quiet nook !

The old mansion had several times been painted since its occupancy by the clergyman's family ; but by this time its hue had gradually become brown and neutral again. The vine, that had at first been ambitious seemingly to climb only by the pillars of the little porch, had twisted itself round and round the posts, and gone agilely up to the cornices, and stretched a dainty green ruffle across the

eaves and the gable, thatching the whole with its innumerable leaves. The porch alone looked like a natural temple, where often did the good clergyman and his family assemble for their hearts' silent worship. After scaling this low and diminutive roof, it took a new start and climbed quite to the roof above the windows, holding on bravely by the clapboards and shingles. And so here and there were to be seen dark patches of leaves, among which were clustered groups of red and white and purple flowers, that looked like islands of beauty sleeping in a sea of emerald; and all showed so charmingly and so picturesquely, too, against the plane of the parsonage front, in the brilliant light of this burning moon, that little might be the wonder if even they who had known every beauty about it for years should again be enraptured as they had been many a time before.

Some of the fruit trees behind the house, apple and pear trees, had decayed and been removed since the bright spring morning when Mr. Humphreys stood there and thoughtfully regarded the spot; but others, more vigorous and thrifty, had sprung up where they stood, and shook down annually their soft showers of white and red blossoms. Other and familiar paths, worn by children's loved feet, too, streaked the little garden, and the little orchard especially, carrying the thoughts pleasantly backward to the white and innocent days that make such a delightful canopy over the head of childhood. And there was a low gap in the old stone wall that served as a sort of stile for them to climb over into the adjoining patch of meadow

land. Many and many a time had the affectionate father stood at that spot and let his feelings and memories run back with him wherever they would, especially to the former times when his youthful prattlers were just beginning to tottle and run about his feet as he strolled thoughtfully through the garden grounds.

From a deserted look, the whole place had suddenly put on a look of life. It seemed as if it really had feelings and sentiments of its own, just as it had fond memories clustered about it and garnered in its nooks, and corners, and chambers. Where formerly the shutter idly flapped in the rising wind, and the tree bough creaked against the side of the house, or perhaps the night owl took the liberty to hoot so dismally half through the summer nights, now went up all the sounds and voices of jubilant life, without dreary echoes, without saddening associations, and with cheering and inspiriting influences.

Ingleside was a real home nest. The nestlings, too, were getting large and restless. They would soon be thinking of taking flight now. They were crowded together too closely, and even now were getting ready to control separate circles of influence that should yearly grow wider and wider. Alfred was quite a young man. He had hitherto acquitted himself with distinguished credit at the academy, bearing away honors and preferences almost as readily as his own father had done before him in his college days.

Mr. Humphreys was debating in his mind the propriety

of making the unaided effort to send him to college. The youth gave promise of much excellence and piety of character, and his father's heart had been rather set on his becoming a dispenser of the precious truths contained in the gospel of Christ ; but if obstacles were to arise in the path of his plans such as he might have any fears of surmounting, he felt that he could not but regret having arrived at his judgment hastily.

Outwardly and inwardly considered, therefore, few places the country round could furnish a more perfect picture of happiness and contentment than Ingleside. It roofed in its own peculiar cares and anxieties, to be sure ; but what earthly nook, be it never so quiet and peaceful, does not ? It had its individual seasons of sunshine and shadow, as so all other places have ; and stern duty issued its mandates to the inhabitants, just as it issued them to hearts situated every where ; but yet the spirit of love and contentment brooded over all, and permeated all, and clothed every one with its most beautiful garment.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SCENE IN A BELFRY.

HARVEY KNELL was the sexton for Brookboro'; and a very faithful sexton he had been for many a year.

He was — to attempt a sort of hasty description of him — a man now verging upon fifty years, rather short in stature, with a head partly bald, and the hair brushed hastily up on either side towards the crown, having lost two fingers entirely on his left hand, and generally wearing a coat much too spacious for his somewhat thin figure when he wore one at all.

Almost any where else, in a large crowd, for example, he would not, that I know, be particularly remarked. He certainly did not possess any noticeable personal qualities; that is, judging by the standard applied to promiscuous assemblies; and yet, take him as a member of our little country parish, and find the exact place he had secured and so long had occupied in our regard and opinion, and watch narrowly the various little peculiarities and idiosyncrasies that went to make up the somewhat mosaic work

he would have seen fit to denominate his character, and Mr. Harvey Knell immediately stepped forward into a consideration that lent him quite all the importance he could himself have desired.

He pretended partly to own the low-roofed, red house in which he lived with his aged mother; and, in truth, probably did at sundry past times invest in it some trifling accumulations of his savings. Beyond this, it was impossible to know for a long time what he did do with his money.

For many years he had followed the calling of a common day laborer. There was work enough to be done around the village, in among the yards, and orchards, and gardens; and when that did not press, there was demand for such as he among the farmers, especially in the planting and haying seasons, and sometimes at harvesting, too. Unless he preferred, — and he did not, — he need never be idle. There was always occupation for him.

Mr. Humphreys hired him to “make” his garden for him, following up the labor of the beginning with his own irregular and more tasteful labor. There was nowhere to be found a better hand; and that was the universal testimony. Mr. Bard invariably hired him, too, every spring, — and Mr. Bard was as particular about his yards as any man need be, — and so did Mr. Wilkinson, and Dr. Jennings, and others I need not here take the trouble to mention. In fact, Harvey Knell, whatever he might be estimated in crowds greater than we of Brookboro’ had the ability to gather, was considered really “a character” with us, especially a *useful* character.

He was industrious and he was frugal. To labor he esteemed his proper vocation in common with the rest. To save, to accumulate, to provide, if possible, against the dark days that might come, — that seemed to be his chief worldly ambition.

He had succeeded in laying away something — so it was afterwards ascertained — when first the project of erecting mills below the village was talked of; how much, no one exactly knew. It happened fortunately to be one of those unsettled topics, purely contingent in their conclusions, over which speculating and inquisitive dispositions had full license to busy themselves as long as they would; and they exercised the whole of their prerogative.

When, however, the operations in the mills had once fairly commenced, a little store in the immediate neighborhood was talked of by some one, who managed quite as slyly to get the ear of Harvey Knell. There was room for a great business there. Property must rise in value, certainly. There were customers enough in that vicinity already to warrant the opening of a store. There should be a store, and at once.

And so one was built; a little affair, though of an ambition far outmeasuring its dimensions.

Mr. Godfrey was its proprietor — a stranger thereabouts, yet possessing the gift of ingratiating himself very readily into some natures; and one of these natures happened to be Harvey Knell's.

Mr. Godfrey took his newly-made friend by the button

hole and talked the whole plan and project into his comprehension. If the sexton could not understand that, he never could be expected to understand any thing. But he did understand it; and he believed it all, too; and what was still more, his belief was not of that character that wrought on him with no show of practical effect. On the contrary, he was so far convinced of the perfect feasibility of Mr. Godfrey's mercantile plans that he willingly put in his entire fortune of four hundred dollars into the common treasury, and so at once embarked in business as a sort of silent and unseen partner.

It was all between themselves. The secret was kept, and no one knew it. The seductive trader proposed this as the best policy, and gave Harvey for his four hundred dollars his own single note and a weak kind of lien on his actual stock in trade. And now, he said encouragingly to the hopeful sexton, we will see what is to hinder *our* getting rich off this great stone mill as well as the rest of them. And the sexton lay patiently in wait for his profits.

It was quite an undertaking; so thought Harvey Knell. In it he had hopefully embarked the whole of his earthly fortune. By it he confidently calculated on quick returns and an easy chance for the balance of his natural life.

A man thus excited, with so much at stake, his mind continually on the stretch in studying and planning, in hoping and fearing, without doubt is in a state bordering somewhere on the confines of the territory known nowadays as monomania. He may not be thought in such a state by

those who are supposed to know him best ; he may not even suspect it of himself. Still it is very possible that the fact is established.

Now, Harvey Knell fell off from his other work to give himself a little time to attend to this. He lounged in the little store by the hour ; a thing he had not, his life through, been in the habit of doing before any where. Indolence began slowly to sap the strength of his energies, and he grew irredeemably lazy. It was a sudden change, and it was a great one. Yet it was nevertheless true. Harvey Knell was hardly the man he had been. His old character had faded — was already, some thought, beginning to depart.

If now a man wanted his services in the old way, perhaps he might have them, and perhaps he might not. It was entirely a matter of chance ; and that chance turned just on the state in which his feelings might happen at that time to be. He still held to the office of sexton, in which he wore the laurels of many long years. No complaint was made of him in the respect of *its* duties. He seemed to hold them in a higher regard than ordinary avocations, as if he might, in his own innocent way, invest them with associations of a half religious character. Regularly each noon, exactly as his own true timekeeper told him it was twelve, he pulled at the rope that sent the old bell a-swinging in the belfry above ; and regularly, too, each night, as nine o'clock came round, or eight o'clock on Saturday evening, he set the bell a-rolling on its axis again. He came to be

associated with the meeting house as a part of the very building. When one met him on the street, it naturally called up the Sunday thoughts that clustered about the church. He had a way of holding his head downward and a little on one side, as he walked, that of itself was irresistible. It consisted of about one half real humility and the other half habit, or as near that as might be. And he rolled up his eyes at you, rather than turned them up, showing off the whites of them to excellent advantage, besides impressing you with thoughts sometimes that you would not care to tell.

He jobbed about enough to live, and that was all. The rest of his time went into the store in whose establishment he had so largely — I now think so entirely — assisted. He sat in a chair just behind the door, and watched the coming in of customers as a spider watches for flies. He kept busy while he lay in wait there, calculating the profits and losses and the innumerable chances of both. He sat and dreamed away the hours, whistling or whittling, spitting at knots of flies that gathered in the sun on the floor, during summer, or roasting himself over the very hot iron box stove in winter.

In truth, Harvey Knell was in no single respect what he once was. Inconsiderable as any one might have chosen to estimate his character before, it was really much more inconsiderable now. He was but the ghost of his former self. He was a shadow, especially in his traits of mind. In short, trade had ruined him.

Ah, so it had — so it had. Ruined him in a style that he, poor man! thought of far more import than any other.

He came down through the village one morning, — it was in December, — and the first person who accosted him was Mr. Pratt, one of the workmen at the mills.

“Good morning, Harvey,” said he. “Heard the news, I s’pose.”

“News? No. What?”

“O, nothing. Only Godfrey’s broke — that’s all.”

“Godfrey — broke — *failed*, do you mean?” asked Harvey, his face deathly pale.

“Yes, all gone; so they say. But I can’t stop; in a hurry, you know.”

“Stay, stay,” pleaded the poor sexton. And for a brief moment the man halted, while Harvey Knell held on with a tight grasp upon his coat collar.

“What *made* him? Tell me all about it. No — no; I’ll go down and get the partic’lars out of him myself.”

The poor man was burning up with the heat of his feelings. He was an object of downright pity.

“But what if you *do* go down?” said the other. “You can’t get in. And if you could, you couldn’t see *him*.”

“Why not? Say.”

“Because his store’s locked up, and he’s cleared nobody knows where. But I must be off. You’ll hear the whole of it, most likely.”

And the two men separated. But during that very brief conversation one poor, simple, trusting heart had lost its

anchor, and went drifting off all over the ocean wherever the waves and winds of fear might drive.

It was even as Mr. Pratt had communicated. He had told the truth ; but it was not the whole truth, such as it was made to enter the mind of Harvey Knell.

The latter's case came to be known generally very soon — the full extent of his risks, his anxieties, and his final losses. Now it was understood a little better why he had latterly grown so changed in his ways. The key being at last obtained, it was easy to unlock the real secret.

The poor man rang his bell at noon, one day, just as he had rung it for years. In the afternoon he sat and pondered on the chances there were before him. Only his mother sat with him, and she said little or nothing. One was on one side of the fireplace and the other on the other. The logs blazed between them, and the flames jetted towards them, and the sparks now and then snapped out on the broad stone hearth. Harvey sat absorbed in thought. He had been brooding over his great loss in this way for many days ; but on this day he seemed gloomier than ever.

The afternoon sun lay sadly across the rug carpet that covered the floor — a wintry sun, that helped on the wretched man with his dark fancies. The hour for supper arrived. He watched his mother, as she went about setting the few dishes on the table, his eyes mechanically following every movement. He sat up to the table at last, but ate nothing. The cup of tea was left untouched.

"What's the matter, Harvey?" asked his mother.
"You aren't well, I know."

He merely shook his head, and dropped his eyes to the table.

Again he crept to his corner, and awaited the hour of nine. He kept pulling out his watch as if he were uneasy for the time to come. As the light of the fire faintly glimmered about him, throwing out his features into a strong relief, and shining brightly over the smooth, bald crown of his head, and as his gray eyes grew still grayer and more staring while he looked in the fire and brooded over his melancholy fancies, he was a person worthy of a particular study. Now and then his aged mother bestowed on him a long and thoughtful look, as if she felt that some secret trouble had fastened its fangs on his heart, and she could not understand it; but he did not regard her attentions at all. He was entirely wrapped up in the garment of his own thoughts. He was preyed upon by a ravenous vulture, that would never let go his peace of heart again. And there, in his solitary corner, he brooded over his troubles, perplexed how he should be able to solve the mystery.

There was *no* solution to it. The knot could not be untied; it must be *cut*!

So he determined to sever it at a single blow.

Drawing his great silver watch again from his pocket, he found it wanted already but five minutes of nine. The hour was close at hand. He sprang from his flag-bottomed chair, and put on his hat to go out.

"Where?" asked his mother, looking up inquiringly at him.

"Time for the bell," said he; and he passed out without another word.

She looked half longingly after him, and as if she would say something more; but he shut the door so suddenly, he was gone almost before she could collect herself.

The bell rang very soon. All the village knew it was nine o'clock. Young folks thought of going to bed, and old people were many of them raking up their fires. Round and round swung the bell in the steeple, ringing nothing but its one monotonous melody: "Nine o'clock! nine — nine o'clock!"

Its sounds ceased, floating away over the air in circles, each moment spreading wider and wider. He deliberately closed the door, locked it on the inside, put the key in his pocket, and climbed the stairs. The moon threw in her white light through the windows, showing him his way.

He reached the bell deck, and poked his head up through the trapdoor. Pushing it back, he climbed to the belfry and let the door down after him.

The lights were gleaming here and there over the village street, and the bright lamps were sparkling in the heavens. He looked over the dead and dreary landscape. He tried to feel that he was strong enough to cope with his troubles. He yielded finally to his despair, and gave a deep, long groan. His eyes were every where — were

nowhere. He saw nothing but his ruin — his utter, irremediable ruin.

* * * * *

Not until Sunday was the search for him successful. They found him hanging by the neck to one of the strong supports of the bell. He had chosen this strangest of all places to meet his end.

Poor Harvey ! Thy knell was sadly, sadly knolled.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A LITTLE CLOUD.

AT first it was "no bigger than your hand." But let me begin and tell all how it sprung up into our sky ; and how it grew large and black ; and how it came to stretch and spread over us so threateningly ; and how it finally burst, driving us in every direction for shelter.

As nearly as I ever knew, or as any one could know, the trouble began between Mr. Joseph Bard, who had now come into pretty much the entire management of his father's business transactions, and Mr. Plimton. It was all about a matter of trade, I believe, and might have been first engendered of a difference of opinion between them concerning the manner of Godfrey's going off. It was rumored that the latter was a little indebted at Mr. Joseph Bard's store when he left.

But it can hardly be traced to its beginning. Like a river, it came from a brook ; and the brook started from a rill ; and the rill from a little trickling fountain ; and the fountain itself was fed from the drops that oozed from the

very heart of the earth. So this difference grew from nothing more than the hidden and trifling feelings that oozed their way out to the surface in their life and conduct.

Both Mr. Plimton and Mr. Joseph Bard were members of the church, and professedly walked exemplary lives. They certainly, therefore, should never have given cause of offence, nor proved stumbling blocks to brethren weaker in the faith than they felt assured they were.

I am not going to say which was most in fault, for such discrimination is no part of the work I have herewith assigned myself. It is free to be concluded, as in all cases of difference, that there was quite fault enough on both sides. It must have been so here certainly; for unless *two* quarrel, there can be no difference. One can hardly quarrel with much vindictiveness with himself.

Mr. Bard would say something highly derogatory to the actions and character of Mr. Plimton, and at once the rumor was borne to the ears of the latter. A regular telegraphic line could not have performed directer duty. And so, on the other side, if Mr. Plimton had any thing to say in reply, rumors were ready, breathless, with swift tongues, to carry the earliest intelligence, together with the advantages of their freshest impressions, to the enemy. And in this mode the gap grew continually wider. The sore did not show any symptoms of healing.

Added to this, making the trouble greater and spreading the circle more and more, each party had individual

friends ; and these friends speedily came to their relief, thinking their sympathy loudly called for ; and this feeling of sympathy was only the match that kindled the two trains long laid — trains of prejudices, and enmity, and malice, such as flashed at the application of the match like trains of powder before the touch of fire.

Old Mr. Bard, and, indeed, the whole of his family, too, was not to be driven from his position. Mr. Joseph Bard must be sustained. Mr. Bard, the elder, had carefully abstained from committing himself to any public difference or dispute with Mr. Plimton, and so had gone along pretty smoothly these many years ; but as soon as his son came into power, a new spirit seemed to plant itself at the helm. He was not only more *progressive* than his father, but, I candidly think, a little more *aggressive*, too. Like the most of young men, especially those who happen to have others to start them and hold them up early in life, he was not at all too considerate, and his prejudices rather outran the slower movements of his judgment.

Mr. Plimton was very much older than he ; but what difference did that make ? Mr. Plimton had presumed, years ago, to be sure, to come and establish himself in business in the village, exactly in opposition to the interests of his father ; and even although his father had not seen fit to make a serious and chronic opposition to it, still it was no reason why the matter might not be taken up now. Mr. Joseph Bard *felt* just like it. He wanted to pay back, as he really deceived himself, the debt so long due. His

energies were just in the right condition. His spirit felt quick, and haughty, and rather revengeful. He would fully assert his family superiority; for he could not bear to stay in the village and have it thought that any name was equal to the name of Bard! So far did his wayward and ignorant feelings carry him.

Mr. Bard's family all became interested in the matter. It would have been next to impossible to keep them out of it. And Mrs. Joseph Bard — once Lucy Burroughs — flamed up quite as much as her husband. She was fierce in her feelings. Ah, Lucy! you had changed somewhat since first your new clergyman drove up to your father's door and sat down to an early supper with you all. She was as *thorough* in what she said as in what she did. In her remarks, generally, none could surpass her for conciseness and meaning. In her denunciations she was absolutely fierce. And, led on by her husband, the interest she took in the quarrel grew daily wider and deeper.

And Lucy's mother was appealed to for her aid. Could it be in her heart to refuse, or even to be indifferent, when the call was so imperative? No — no, indeed. If Mrs. Bard, the elder, determined that her son must be sustained through thick and through thin, then why should not Mrs. Deacon Burroughs come to the same determination respecting her daughter? Would not the feeling of *pride* require it of her, if all other motives and influences failed?

So Mrs. Burroughs fell into the ranks of the malcon-

tents, carrying her individual forces with her. And in this way the circle of mischief got a good start, and promised to spread widely and rapidly in the usually calm surface of the social lake of our parish.

And if Mr. Plimton was assailed, would *his* wife or family be any more ready for beating a retreat than the wife or family of the other party? Not a bit of that, indeed. It is certainly due to the character and worth of Mrs. Plimton to say, that she was above many of the petty trickeries many angered and indignant people think it necessary to resort to on such occasions ; yet her sense of justice and of right was no less quick and keen than that of any other individual. It is only natural to conclude that Mr. Plimton relied on the strongest supporter of his cause in the person of his wife, and that in no particular was she found wanting.

All these things are unpleasant to tell, and so I certainly feel it to be ; but as, in the present case, they happened to be the precursors of events far more important than could at first have been foreseen by any one, it comes strictly within my duty to put them down in the order they occurred.

The society held its weekly meetings, during the winter, sometimes in one place and sometimes in another. But whenever it was appointed at Mr. Bard's house, Mrs. Plimton never attended ; and when it came Mrs. Plimton's turn, neither Mrs. Bard, nor Mrs. Joseph Bard, nor Mrs. Burroughs attended. Now, a sewing society, in itself consid-

ered, *may* be a very harmless social institution ; and, on the other hand, it may be the means of doing a great deal of social mischief. I incline to the opinion that it would have been far better for all interests concerned had the meetings of our society, for that winter at least, been abolished. Some considerable work was done ; but all of it was not done with the needle. Much cutting out was performed ; but not altogether of garments. And many plans were suggested, and discussed, and here and there adopted ; but they did not entirely contemplate the best interests of the parish.

Mrs. Bard, the elder, one day met with Mrs. Plinton. In villages generally, such a contact would be set down as a matter quite of course. Indeed, had such a meeting *not* occurred for a considerable time between two neighbors, the wonder would then have been the more reasonable.

They met on the sidewalk.

Mrs. Plinton accosted Mrs. Bard, unwilling to forget what she soberly felt her duty.

Mrs. Bard stared at her very hard, but said nothing.

Quite unconsciously, as it afterwards seemed to her on thinking it over, Mrs. Plinton stopped ; and Mrs. Bard stopped, too. A secret power brought them face to face.

Mrs. Bard, seeing what she had really done, was seized with the impulse to *begin* what was to be said ; so she opened with, —

“ Really, ma’am, I don’t understand what this means.”

Nor did the other understand ; and, between them both, the matter was in a maze — quite so.

"Did you wish to say any thing to me?" questioned Mrs. Bard.

"I am sure," was the response, "I was not particular at all. Yes, it's quite cold to-day;" and she laughed just a little, showing the edges of her teeth.

Ah, Mrs. Plimton! was that altogether the better and surer way of conciliating your old friend? Was there no sweeter method than this? Did you in *this* way design to heap "coals of fire" on her head?

"I know it's cold," retorted Mrs. Bard, very sharply.

"You were not at the sewing society at my house last week?"

"I there! No. Why should *I* be there, pray?"

"You are a member still, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am a member still; but what of that? Am I expected out on all occasions, and at all places indiscriminately, I wish to know?"

"O, no," answered Mrs. P.; "yet I know how much you usually ascribe to the influence of *example*."

"So I do; and it is for that very reason that I was *not* there. My example kept away others, perhaps; at least, I hope so."

"Mrs. Joseph Bard, perhaps?" said Mrs. Plimton.

"Yes, my son's wife. Could you *expect* her, Mrs. Plimton, to go into your house after — after ——"

"After *what*, pray, Mrs. Bard?"

"Why, after what's been said. *You* know as well as *I* do."

"Have *I* said any thing?"

"Mrs. Plimton!" exclaimed the other, one half astonishment and the other half indignation.

"Have I *done* any thing?"

"Well, I should think you would *know*, if any body can be expected to!"

"Will you please to tell me plainly *what*, Mrs. Bard?"

"No, I'm quite sure I sha'n't! If you haven't yet found out, you must take your leisure to do so. Really, this outdoes all that's been done before! I never heard of such proceedings!"

"Nor I," added Mrs. Plimton. "I do not know why you should see fit to treat me as you do, or speak of me as you do. I am not aware of being guilty of any act particularly wrong. If I have been, of course I am ready at any time and at all times to make reparation."

"O, yes; a matter quite of course, ma'am — quite of course! I understand it, I think."

Mrs. Bard's tone, being in such a style of irony, was calculated of all other things to sting the other to the quick. It hardly failed of its proper effect, either.

"You seem to doubt my *sincerity*, Mrs. Bard," said the latter. "I am compelled to ask you what you *mean* by it — what *reason* you have for it?"

"O, nothing — nothing at all."

And she laughed still more provokingly.

"It's quite easy to provoke one, Mrs. Bard; but do you stop to consider the difficulty of regaining a friend once lost?"

"No, I confess I *do not* in all cases. Friends are put at every variety of value, you know. Some are not *worth* regaining even at the most trifling outlay of pains. Some drop away without so much as the first thought of anxiety on the part of those who knew them."

Mrs. Plinton fixed her eyes steadily on the eyes of the other. She gazed at her as if she were bent on reading every thought that passed ever so lightly through her mind. It would be difficult to attempt to describe or to paint that look. It could not be done. It expressed what pen cannot be supposed adequately to express.

"You are an older person than I am," at length said Mrs. Plinton, "and should set me better examples. If your manner to me at this time is, in your opinion, wholly consistent with your Christian profession, Mrs. Bard, I confess I can entertain but a very slight respect for that profession. I have offered, as you know, to set any thing right that through me has gone wrong. What more *can* I do? What more would you *have* me do?"

"I do not wish you to do any thing, Mrs. Plinton, I am quite sure. Why should I? It is a matter of perfect indifference to me. How can you expect me to take the least interest in your affairs?"

"Perhaps if you took *less* interest, matters might have gone on a little more smoothly."

"Umph! But you must not calculate on my indorsing all your opinions any more than on my taking an interest in them. I beg to be entirely excused from that business."

“Only be sure, Mrs. Bard, that all your persecution, and all the persecution of your whole family, will never be sufficient to change my opinion of their conduct. *That* will remain — always. It is a kind of conduct that would scarcely be excusable among heathen.”

“Very fine talk, really — *very* fine talk! I should be glad to stop and hear more of it, ma’am; but really I feel a little in haste. I trust you will overlook the necessity.”

“There are few things you say and do, nowadays, that one *could* overlook, I think, unless one’s disposition was remarkably forgiving

“As I have no doubt you judge your own to be.”

“I do not reply to such remarks as that, Mrs. Bard. They cannot reach me.”

“No, of course not. Every thing is thrown away on you just now. Good day! I must really be going.”

Mrs. Plimton stood perfectly still, and looked in her face all the while. Some indescribable infatuation seemed to hold her there.

At last they separated. It was a deeply unfortunate meeting for both of them; and not for them alone, but for those friends whose sympathies were so intimately intertwined with theirs, and whose relations still spread again every where over the interests and happiness of the entire village.

Much was talked about the affair, and it gave cause for a great share of scandal. It would have been very strange

had it been otherwise. It would have been stranger still if this difference did not quickly spread, impressing into its service on either side those whose habits had hitherto been peculiarly those of peace. This was the legitimate result of it. But that shall be comprised properly in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DISPUTES AND DIFFERENCES.

THE next notable thing happened on communion day. Mrs. Bard would not go to the Lord's table if Mrs. Plimton and her husband went.

Both of the latter did go ; and, as a consequence, not only Mrs. Bard, senior, but her husband, likewise, and Mr. Joseph Bard, with his wife, staid away.

There could not have happened a more cruel thing for the church. It created a great deal of remark and discussion, and that of the most painful character. Religion was scandalized. It lost the very purity that gives it its secret and all-pervading power. Its profession now appeared to unbelievers to be nothing more than a merely mechanical ceremony, with no life or heart in it. It looked like a showy garment, to be worn only on special occasions and afterwards thrown off as it best suited the whim or the necessity of the wearer.

People who had hitherto paid at least a show of outward respect to its teachings now involuntarily asked themselves

if it did not claim more than its desert — if it were not presumptuous, and hollow, and artificial. And some who had been reflecting soberly and seriously of their condition of heart felt all their progress towards the new life suddenly hindered, and their growth in grace chilled as by an untimely frost.

The troubles spread and multiplied abundantly. Families having consented to take up what were at first only individual differences, and to invest them with an importance they might otherwise never have acquired, they wrought with a tremendous influence all over the parish, trampling down every thing that came in their way. Troubles may generally be adjusted so long as they are confined within their original bounds and the real and true *cause* of them is kept closely in sight. But the moment other parties, entirely foreign to the quarrel, are drawn or enticed into the circle, the first relation between the aggrieved ones is immediately changed. Positions are shifted. New questions, purely incidental and accidental, arise. Fresh suspicions are born. The truth becomes colored and distorted. Forgiveness is gone. Charity dies out. Envyings and strifes crowd into the lists and begin to wage their cruel battles. And so finally all becomes confusion, that is still more difficult to quiet than was the first difference itself.

Enough of these troubles happen and are still happening every where to give one the exact import of their character. It is always dangerous to intermeddle with them

when they first begin ; but to try and calm the storm after it has set in to rage so wildly is worse than folly itself. It must be supposed, if the thing be attempted, that the several parties are at least charitably inclined one towards another, and waiting only for an overture of peace and reconciliation ; but nothing is more certainly understood than that such an inclination is just the last that enters into their sentiments. Else would the quarrel cease of itself.

While the difficulties were in their primitive state, and concerned only the temporary relations existing between Mr. Joseph Bard and Mr. Plimton, Mr. Humphreys did not deem it advisable or necessary to interpose his influence, unless, perhaps, either of them had seen fit to appeal to him for such interference. Sometimes, as he knew very well, where persons are quietly left to reflect alone on their differences, and no words are thrown in by another that can have the effect to give undue importance to the same, there is greater room for the feeling of charity and benevolence to steal in. It might have been so in this very case.

But when others interested their feelings in the quarrel, and families spread rumors and reports without number ; and the original subject of the difference became so stretched and distorted as not to be recognized or identified ; and other interests, and questions, and disputes were dragged promiscuously in, like fuel heaped on a blazing fire ; and other colorings were given to matters than naturally belonged to them ; and enemies on either side em-

braced the convenient opportunity to hasten to a standard newly raised, that recognized a battle they had longed to begin for years, — then it is plain to see that the difficulties assumed a complicated shape that required a hand of no common skill to disentangle them.

And now that the quarrel had entered the church, and boldly assailed Religion and her heavenly-minded ceremonies, and threatened with its devastating power to overthrow the influences that grew out of faith, and worship, and prayer, Mr. Humphreys felt himself loudly called on as a pastor in the church of Christ to place himself in the very front of the battle, and to wave back the march of the opposing parties with all the force of his delegated authority.

He was decided and firm in this duty, yet none could have been more judicious and considerate in approaching it. It was only after repeated prayer and repeated self-communings that he stepped forward to do what his conscience plainly required of him. It was not as an arbiter between contending parties that he began his work, but only as an earnest peacemaker, advising them to bear all things, to suffer every earthly wrong, to yield every point in dispute, before bringing such open reproach on the cause of Christ and making their religion only a stumbling block for their weaker brethren and the world.

If they felt themselves able to settle their worldly difficulties better than others could do it for them, then they were at perfect liberty to do so. No one would hinder

them ; at least, their minister would not. But when they brought those differences within the church, and offered them, not for adjustment at all, but for the sake of spreading their influence still wider, at the very altar over which their pastor was set in charge, then they took a step he felt bound by every sacred and holy consideration to check, even if by the means he was himself made finally a sacrifice.

And he took the measures he thought best adapted to the proper end he had in view.

First he called on Mr. Plinton. It was purely accidental that he went there first, for he saw him first. From him he learned what was his own view of the matter, as well as his own history of its rise, progress, and present condition. He collected into one consolidated view all his feelings respecting the dispute, trying fully and entirely to understand the conditions on which he would freely enter on an amicable adjustment.

It is really due to Mr. Plinton, too, to say that he had in no wise been an aggressor in this quarrel. It was not opened by any instrumentality of his. The warmer blood of young Mr. Bard was what kindled the flame, and what caused such a great and glowing heat.

But on one point Mr. Plinton was firm and immovable ; he had received the first wrong from Mr. Bard, and looked to him for the first apology. Then his way lay open to forgiveness and forgetfulness through all the rest of the matter. This was the most Mr. Humphreys could bring

him to admit. He said if he did *more* than this, he could not but feel himself a hypocrite; for even if he *professed* to forgive his enemy, yet, knowing that his charity was received insultingly, his heart would not fail of itself to retract what his lips had spoken.

Next Mr. Humphreys called on Mr. Joseph Bard. He found him at the store, and his father was alone with him.

The clergyman opened the subject frankly and fully, concealing nothing, assuring them that the affair had reached a state where his interference was imperatively required, and in which he should utterly fail of his duty if he neglected to put forth both his counsels and his admonitions without further delay.

Mr. Israel Bard rather took the subject out of his son's hands, and went on with the conversation with Mr. Humphreys in his stead.

"I hardly think your interference is called for in this case, Mr. Humphreys," said he, employing a highly constrained tone of dignity. "Of course we appreciate the spirit that actuates you; but we must decline to allow you to enter into affairs of moment only to ourselves. We do not see how they concern any one else."

Mr. Humphreys was hardly expecting such a reply. He stood a moment perfectly calm and thoughtful. No further word was spoken on either side.

Then he remarked, —

"If this were but a private difference, Mr. Bard, I

should certainly hope and pray you would be both able and ready to adjust it."

"Well, but what *is* it, pray," interrupted Mr. Bard, "if it is *not* such a difference?"

Joseph, his son, stood by, fully entering into the spirit and feelings of his father.

"It may have been such in the first place," said Mr. Humphreys; "but you certainly cannot say that of it *now*. It has grown to be a widespread quarrel. Though I have never presumed to interfere before, yet I confess that I have observed its progress, swift and rapid, with feelings of fear. It is not what it was at the outset. Circumstances have changed it. I think you must be willing to admit as much as that yourself, Mr. Bard."

"I don't know," was the slow and reluctant answer.

"It is plain enough to every one. I say, Mr. Bard, both to yourself and your son, that, while this was a private difference, I did not feel called on to interpose. But now that it enters the church, and threatens to make the havoc it surely will if not immediately checked, I *am* authorized to say something; and I have come here to-day, in the best of feelings, with the hope that I may be able to adjust what goes so wrong. I want peace and I want to make peace. Nothing is more killing to the cause of true religion than strifes and bickerings. They should be stopped as soon after they are begun as possible. When, as now, they assault religion, — when they come boldly into the church where we all worship Christ, where we pray for some por-

tion of his own spirit of humility and forbearance, — it is necessary that he who has been called to minister there should not be wanting in the discharge of his duty.”

“Well, Mr. Humphreys,” said Mr. Bard, “what do you conscientiously consider to be your duty in the present case?”

“To try and heal differences — to exhort all parties to apply a spirit of charity and forgiveness.”

Mr. Bard glanced over his spectacles at his son, and smiled sarcastically.

“I am afraid you will find the task a thankless one,” said he.

“Still,” returned Mr. Humphreys, “it is no less my duty to try and create peace. That is as much my duty as to preach the gospel. It is a *part* of the gospel. I should come short if I shrank from this.”

“Well, how do you suppose this reconciliation can be effected? Of course you have a plan to propose.”

“Mr. Bard,” answered he very solemnly, dropping his voice as he spoke, “you and myself have certainly professed to lead religious lives long enough to know the real meaning of Christian charity. I need not explain to you what it means. If this difficulty or any other difficulty is to be settled peacefully, it can only be done by closely applying the Christian principle of forgiveness to every part of it. Nothing will test the *true* Christian sooner than this. His profession cannot come short of the uttermost

demands of this spirit, if it is a profession that has ever taken any hold upon his heart.

"Let us go to work now in the right way. If the first step was wrong before, let us at least have it right *now*. There was haste then and a lack of consideration; if we go to work now with thoughtful care, and, above all, with Christian humility, I have little doubt of accomplishing what I have set before myself."

"I hardly think you can make such an impression as you desire, Mr. Humphreys," was the reply.

"Well," said he, "will you frankly tell me just the whole of the difference between yourself, or between your son, rather, and Mr. Plinton? Let us begin at the beginning."

Mr. Bard glanced at his son. The latter was watching every expression of his father with an eagle eye, and of course was now ready to explain himself at the receipt of this quick signal.

"I suppose I know as much about it *myself* as any one," said the younger man, speaking rapidly and smartly.

"Well," repeated Mr. Humphreys, "what is the whole trouble, then?"

"Why, if it can best be taken care of by the parties most interested in it, I do not think it worth while to go into particulars at all. I prefer to have nothing at all to say about it."

This was a heavy blow aimed at the kindness of the clergyman certainly.

"But that seems to be only a matter of opinion," said

Mr. Humphreys. "If you will show to me that it will be better for yourselves, and for the Church and her interests, or even that it will be as well, to let the matter take such care of itself as it may, or to let it go on as it seems to be going on now, as to stop it just where it is, before the mischief goes any farther, then you may be *sure* that my interest in it shall be withdrawn entirely. All I beg is — peace. Only let us have that, and all will be well."

"I'm sure," said Joseph, "*I* shall not hinder."

"Very well, then. Now, why will you not consent to make some proposition for an arrangement. I will willingly act in the capacity of bearer of any messages you may feel inclined to send to Mr. Plimton. I will consent to *do any thing*, if by the means I can be assured that this breach will be healed. Come, Mr. Bard, what shall I say from you both, or from either of you, to Mr. Plimton? But first I ought in candor to tell you what *he* says."

"Then you have seen him," said Mr. Bard the elder.

"Yes, only a short time ago. I talked with him on nothing but this very matter."

Mr. Bard and his son exchanged glances again.

"What does he say?" asked Joseph.

"That if you are willing to offer the first apology for the first wrong, he is ready to forgive and forget all that has happened since. That is *just* what he said."

"Umph!" ejaculated the young man; "so I thought. He expects *me* to offer an apology to *him*! It can't be

done, Mr. Humphreys. I mean no disrespect to *you*, sir ; but I say it can't be done."

"I do not know by whom the first stone was thrown, I am sure. It is not for me to inquire. The one whose conscience tells him he is the guilty party certainly ought not, if he be a Christian, to refuse to make the first admission. I think that is his absolute duty."

"It is not *my* duty," said Joseph.

"Then of course you are not conscious of being the aggressor."

After considerably more conversation, which seemed to amount to just nothing at all, and to advance the adjustment quite as much, Mr. Bard the elder finally came to the conclusion that any further attempts on the part of Mr. Humphreys would be perfectly futile, for his own and his son's minds were made up to submit to no wrong from others quietly ; and that, if others had once wronged them, the only condition of reconciliation on their part was full and ample amends. He should *demand* it — not more in this case than in all others.

And exactly there the matter rested.

As an umpire, as a peacemaker, as a kind and considerate counsellor who had nothing at heart but the happiness of all parties and the profound peace of his people, Mr. Humphreys saw with much sorrow that he was without power or influence.

But he was still the pastor of his parish ; and as one set over his flock to look soberly and prayerfully to it that dis-

sensions were not quietly and without opposition allowed to make head against the welfare of those under him, he discoursed pointedly and earnestly from his pulpit on the sinfulness of these practices and the great evil done by their means to the whole church. He cited the words of holy writ, "But woe to him by whom offence cometh," and made an application of it to whomsoever wrought mischief or practised malice and strife.

In all this he did only his duty. He would gladly have done more if more he could have done; but that seemed impossible. He took the whole matter with him to his closet, and there besought with much earnestness the aid he needed in a time like this. Again and again he personally appealed to the parties. Mr. Plinton was fixed in his determination; and the Bards and all their numerous friends were no less firm in theirs.

Poor man! how sadly he felt the loss of Deacon Burroughs now! The good deacon had gone to his rest years ago, bequeathing to the church the wealth of his saintly example. He would have been a wise counsellor for Mr. Humphreys. But he was gone; and, what cut the clergyman's heart still more deeply, Mrs. Burroughs had enlisted her sympathies so strongly for the husband of Lucy that she hastily cut adrift from her clergyman entirely, and became one of the earliest to accuse him of a meddling disposition in interesting himself in affairs that could be of no concern to him.

This was the cry very soon raised against Mr. Hum-

phreys ; and it is true that it came from the Bards. It was quickly caught up and echoed far and near. From the objects against which their malicious efforts were at first directed, a diversion was made upon their clergyman. He heard of it all. He knew just how the trouble grew. But still, while he continually carried conciliation and kindness around with him, he never shrank from the more severe duties his sacred calling imposed on him.

This was only one of the stern conditions of his ministry.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RESULT OF A QUARREL.

STILL spread the mischief daily. The little cloud was fast becoming a great cloud — thick, black, and portentous.

On the side of Mr. Plimton, as sympathizers with him at least, were Doctor Jennings and Mr. Wilkinson, and many more of the leading men of the town, who understood that he was at all times ready to enter upon a reconciliation when Mr. Bard should be willing to make the first concession, and rather inclined to the opinion that the Bards were obstinate, and only obstinate, in their conduct.

None of the latter came to the communion table, and had not for a long time. The sermons of their minister on the subject of the troubles seemed to have but incensed them the more. They began now to feel unquiet and rebellious under his spiritual reproof. Even Mrs. Burroughs herself, she who had first cared for their clergyman when he came a youthful and inexperienced stranger into their midst, — even she followed on closely after the rest, and

persistently absented herself from the table at which were monthly commemorated the sufferings and sacrifice of our Lord.

As the matter grew *broad*, so it grew *deep* likewise. It could not draw its sustenance from only the surface. If it lived, it must strike down its roots deeply, and drive or kill out other roots, and occupy the entire soil alone. It was ravenous, envious, grasping, and wholly selfish.

So, in proportion as it spread, it awakened new feelings in the breasts of our people. Hard feelings were quickly engendered where before all had been peace. Even old neighbors and close friends would dispute on this matter and separate in anger. And thus many a strong bond of friendship was melted instantly away in the heat of this white and overpowering flame.

Women, who had been in the almost daily habit of visiting one another through back yards and gardens, and chatting pleasantly of the topics of domestic and village interest that might come uppermost in their thoughts, now shut tightly the gates that divided their little domains, and sullenly refused to continue their simple and sincere intercourse.

The farmers who lived out of the village atmosphere, and who were not at all tainted with the disease that seemed therein to have broken out and to be at this time holding its high revel, were at a perfect loss what to say, or what to do, or, in fact, to what conclusion to come. They gathered together oftener in and around the village stores ;

and as the story was told over to them again and again, and one opinion was ventured after another, and question upon question was propounded and answered, the heat grew steadily greater, and spread itself wider, and burned down before its fierce blaze every fresh and good purpose that could have grown up in any heart of the parish.

The factory people — the owners of the mills and their many operatives — had not as yet openly sided with either party, except so far as at one time to approve what was done just then on one side, or to condemn just as readily if in their opinion the same party went wrong. To the general cause they did not see fit to commit themselves at all. Regularly each Sunday they were to be found in their places in church, and quite as regularly they took the liberty to dispense their public criticisms both on the minister and his preaching.

As they had before said of him, he was not a man at all *after their tastes*. And taste with them was much more than doctrine, or principle, or devoted faithfulness, either. He was too plainspoken — quite too much so; and that was hardly an evidence of refined breeding! He was altogether more vehement than a clergyman need be in his appeals to his congregation, and much too personal likewise. He should restrain himself within proper bounds. A well “educated” man would certainly do so. There was, therefore, no reason why he should not, unless for the single and simple reason that he was not a man of education.

They would have him more *modish* — more after certain patterns they felt competent to supply. He should be much more “gentlemanly” in his pulpit address; and did he not take too much pleasure in digging in his garden, *for a minister*? Were not white and delicate hands absolute requisites in the character and appearance of a clergyman — a man who was called on, too, to visit familiarly in every family of his parish?

There was no end to what they would have different. Their judgments were very free indeed; but the most ludicrous part or characteristic of them was, they criticized important *principles* through the medium of the most ridiculous *trifles*. They made up opinions of efficacious preaching from the peculiar attitude of the minister in the pulpit. Faithfulness they measured by his gestures. Uction was another expression for general manners. They charged him with being uneducated because his hands were not quite as white as they would have been had he raised fewer vegetables for his family in his snug little kitchen garden. He was hardly *in fashion*; that was the point, the sum and substance of it all; and *because* he was not in the fashion, — in *their* fashion, — they stood ready to offer him a sacrifice whenever the exact time of immolation might come.

And during this time they had closely watched all their opportunities. No occasion having hitherto presented itself, they were only patient, lying in wait for the day. A better man than he they thought they *ought* to have, and they felt sure they *could* have. As their own success in

business matters was assured to them, and wealth began to flow abundantly into their coffers, they naturally looked about them with all the empty vanity of mere worldlings, who measure happiness by yardsticks and bank bills, and determined that "something ought to be done." They were for having a man who had some "outside show" to him.

This was an element that was introduced into our parish the very day the strangers moved in. I do not by any means say it is inseparable from all owners and builders of mills, nor that all are as empty in their judgments as they showed themselves to be. That does not follow at all from the description I have been giving. I am speaking of it as nothing but *a fact* in the experience we were called to go through.

Related thus to the rest of our people, having for a long time now been steadily working their peculiar influence among our number, infusing a spirit of dissatisfaction and restlessness into our midst, the families of Messrs. Belden and Brown assumed to be almost perfect in their guiding power, and freely gave out what *ought* to be done by the parish. They had much to say of Mr. Humphreys and of his peculiar unfitness for the place he happened to occupy. He might have done very well *once*, said they; but he is really quite behind the times *now*.

To *say* such things had at least the effect to arouse thoughts, and fears, and suspicions in the breasts of the more sincere and simple ones, such as would otherwise

never have entered there. In this way they created mischief. Their influence was highly injurious to all our interests. They might have boasted of their importance to the business concerns of Brookboro'; but old Brookboro' were a thousand times better off *without* such assistance than with it; for what were considerations of dollars and cents merely by the side of those of united families, and an affectionate people, and a high and healthy religious feeling?

So, seeing that their opportunity at last had come, by the means of the wide breaches that were made between the different members, they rushed forward in breathless haste to secure the point they had held fast to so long.

They made propositions to *both parties* to the effect that the differences might in a measure be reconciled by the sacrifice of the clergyman!

The Bards were struck with its force. They had not soberly looked in this way at the subject before. Really, it was something worth considering. They would turn it over and over, and see if any good for themselves could be got out of it.

To help on their peculiar view of the new proposal was the fact that they had already been compelled to give up going to church at all, in consequence of the plain speech and godly counsel of Mr. Humphreys. They thought it was all aimed at *them*—none of it against the Plimtons and their sympathizers. In truth, Mr. Plimton and his family still continued to attend church regularly and to

partake of the communion. And Mr. Humphreys had nothing to say against it. But because *they* had left the church from scruples of conscience, (as they most mistakenly persuaded themselves,) and Mr. Humphreys plainly and boldly, at proper times, had rebuked the spirit that actuated the wrong movement, therefore he was arrayed against *them*!

It was not so. He was but trying, as he was solemnly sworn to do, to crush out, with an iron heel if need be, the fell spirit of envy, and strife, and disunion that was threatening such a total blight to all their temporal and religious interests.

At any rate, as things went, the mill people were exceedingly active in their efforts, working night and day, poisoning every channel of communication, and leaving no single stone unturned. Already were all the Bards, with their numerous retinue of friends, of the opinion that Mr. Humphreys had taken up weapons against them; and, full of this fatal and unhappy prejudice, they were quite prepared to receive as truth even the most poisoned seeds of calumny and reproach. The whispers against him and his usefulness, that would have been laughed to scorn by them but a little time ago, were now received with the weight of sober and serious evidence, adduced only after much anguish of mind against their once-beloved pastor.

It is verily strange that the strength of prejudices is so imposing. It baffles the most skilful analyst of mental

mysteries to determine the secret and the secret citadel of all their strength. If it is only true that they are distorted judgments highly colored, why is it not equally the case that *reason itself*, wrapped about, as in humanity it always must be, with the tinted and warming garments of the feelings, does not wield a power equally imposing? Why are blind prejudices so much sooner followed as guides than astute and far-seeing reason?

Mrs. Belden dropped in at Mrs. Bard's, and frankly explained to her that, unless they procured another and a better clergyman in the village, *they* were going to procure a subscription sufficient to erect a church by themselves!

Why — what was the matter?

And Mrs. Belden had to go through their old story all over again: the dissatisfaction with the man and with his preaching; his old-time style; his obsolete manners; his peculiar plainness of speech, which she could not for the life of her call any thing but bluntness; his time of active service having fairly passed; and when that was once passed, other men should be hunted up.

Besides, — and upon this point she dwelt earnestly, — there was now an unhappy division in the church. Old members could not agree. It was of no consequence at all what might have been the original cause of the trouble; the minister had voluntarily placed himself in the breach, and he ought to get the fire from both sides — yes, from *both* sides. He was hardly to be called a *peace* maker — he had *not* made peace. He had wrought nothing but

mischief. The old cause of the quarrel was forgotten; and it would have been forgotten long before it was had *he* not stepped in officiously to rake over coals that had been buried beneath the embers. He had put himself in the way of adjustment; it was to be expected, then, that others would put him *out of it* just as soon as they saw and felt that the power was in their own hands.

She went on still further: Mr. Humphreys had nearly or quite served out his term of usefulness. Little more could in the nature of things be looked for from him. What good he might have been the means of doing in his day it was not for her to speak of. She only considered now the stumbling block he had become finally to them all, and the cause of offence where there need be no offence. She did not believe in the *pensioning* system, by which a clergyman holds a tenure over a parish because simply of his early services, and holds it even after his services have ceased to be of any use or influence. If now this single step was taken, all would be harmony soon again. It was only he who was keeping the people apart. It was he who was really dividing his parish. Once put it out of his *power* to work this continued mischief, and nothing could hinder a rapid fusion of the opposing elements and a great growth in prosperity temporal and spiritual.

In all these views, though expressed in a little different style, Mrs. Belden was supported by Mrs. Brown; and both were in turn supported by their husbands and by the long list of families that were immediately dependent on them for support.

It was a long battle, and it was obstinately fought. Of course the blindest party was that which charged the other with following nothing but prejudice, and they could very readily see that they were nowise affected by it themselves. Hard words were employed freely at all times, but now they seemed to concentrate upon their minister. He must be the sacrifice offered for peace, if peace was to be had. It came to be at length common talk. The first cause of the trouble was lost sight of. Parties had changed their positions. Enmities were shifted and directed against other objects. The most bitter of the two factions had voluntarily gone over from its chosen ground and encamped on one entirely different. Its opposition now was not so much against its old foe as against the minister. In him it beheld a greater object of hatred. He had openly sided with its enemy, and so become at once worse than that enemy itself even could have been.

The original friends of Mr. Plimton, on the other hand, though decided in their opinion that their minister had done nothing but his sacred duty, were still disposed to countenance the use of almost *any* means for healing the difference. Alas! poor, weak human nature! But so it really was. So sorely were their minds distracted with the long-continued troubles, they felt as if they would gladly give up their pastor — long as he had faithfully ministered over them and much as they really felt their hearts loved him — if by the sacrifice their community might again be made one.

And Mr. Humphreys knew well enough of the progress of the matter. It could not fail to reach his ears, the whole of it. And sincere as his efforts had ever been to promote the growth of grace among them all, and earnest as had been his constant prayers to God to give them a right spirit, disposed to peace and charity one with another, he still felt that, if he were really called on at this time to make the sacrifice, — to tear out his dearest and most precious feelings from the soil where they were so deeply rooted, — to give up every thing he held sacred in life, every thing but his final hope of heaven, for their sakes, — he could do it all without a complaint or even a repining murmur.

He and his devoted wife sat up late, one night, after the rest of the family were buried in slumber. He had wished for some time to speak frankly to her of the subject, but his tenderer feelings had hitherto prevented him. Now, however, he told her the exact condition of the parish and what he had almost come to the conclusion was his duty.

“I think I ought to ask for a dismissal.”

Caroline’s first thought was of her feelings — her tender memories, her sweet associations with the spot he so suddenly proposed leaving. And she expressed herself rather more earnestly than she otherwise might. Still, it was all very natural.

“I can do no more good here,” said he. “The whole parish seem to be of that opinion. When I first brought you into this quiet village, my dear wife, on that beautiful

and sober day in the autumn, I certainly thought I might be allowed here to spend my strength and my days. Here I hoped, if God were willing, that I might raise up sincere friends for the gospel, and friends to myself for only the gospel's sake. My *strength* is nearly spent — that is, the freshness and vigor of it are gone. I am quite along in life. But my days may not be suffered to stop here. Something tells me plainly of what is soon to come."

His wife expressed great surprise; and the tears came into her eyes as she ran rapidly over the long past and tried vainly to pierce the dark future.

"I had hoped," he continued, "to live to send my oldest boy to college, and fit him for the calling that has such strong claims on him; but even that may be denied me. I cannot tell. Let God do every thing in his wisdom. It is not for us to complain. I bear my own conscience abundant witness that I have endeavored to do nothing more than my duty. I find that some think I have done more than this; but I am responsible to my own conscience, which is the only judgment seat within my heart. My office is no common office; and I have labored, with God's guidance, to perform whatever appertained to it. I may have come short, but not knowingly."

"But your going cannot reconcile these differences," remarked his wife thoughtfully.

"I do not know of a certainty that it will; but that is the present persuasion of my people. If now I persist in staying, I should be as much guilty of standing in their

light as if they really thought what they *say* they do. No, I cannot consent to become their ruin. I *ought* to go. I *must* go. All sides seem to demand it, and I should do wrong to remain after my time of usefulness is spent. I need not mention the influences that are made to bear so heavily against me, for that would do no good. It would beget wrong feelings. I only try to bow in resignation to my Father's will."

It was very late when they retired that night ; but they had been to the throne of grace together for counsel in difficulties so great as these.

A black cloud now rested over the parsonage. It seemed to have moved from the parish altogether, and settled itself only there.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PASTOR AND PEOPLE

MR. JOSEPH BARD heard every thing almost as soon as it was spoken — I was going to say as soon as it was *thought*. What Mr. Humphreys was about concluding on as his duty in this sorrowful crisis he by some means managed to possess himself of.

The plan Mr. Humphreys proposed to himself would hardly suit the views of Mr. Bard the younger. It would rather diminish the renown of the *victory* he was hoping to achieve. So he called one or two others into consultation with him. It would not do to let the clergyman resign; he must be requested to do so — as if he were finally *driven* away!

And Mr. Joseph Bard drew up a paper, briefly rehearsing the unhappy difficulties that were distracting the parish and laying the single cause of their longer continuance at the feet of his minister. The document, therefore, went on to say that if Mr. Humphreys really felt actuated by the desire for peace, and with the Christian spirit he had

so long professed, he would not hesitate to make any personal sacrifice the occasion seemed to demand of him. And only as a condition of peace, and simply as a promise of their future welfare as a church and a people, was it asked respectfully but earnestly of him that he would again resign his pastoral authority into the hands from which it had been received.

Was ever a paper drawn more hypocritically, the whole tenor of young Mr. Bard's conduct being understood? Could any thing be conceived more insulting to a manly and honest spirit? Could there be said any thing more cruel and cutting to a faithful and self-sacrificing Christian's heart?

The young man had too much native shrewdness — I will not give him the credit of any *nobler* feeling or quality — to circulate that paper himself; so he put it into other hands and set it going on its rounds.

If he could but forestall the purpose of Mr. Humphreys! — that was his object.

At first it was passed among the Bards and the friends of the Bard family. Men and women signed it together. Then, as its column of names swelled, it was quietly carried to those who had thrown their sympathies on the other side, but who were willing even to sink those sympathies altogether if by the means the old quarrel could be adjusted. And upon its being strenuously represented that the clergyman's resignation or dismissal was the only condition of a full reconciliation again, these men did not hesitate

to affix their names to a request that would lose them a pastor with whom they could conscientiously find no fault, and whom they already loved as they could hardly love another.

Mr. Joseph Bard talked with Doctor Jennings about it.

"I'm sure," said he, "that no *good* can come of his staying any longer; and you and I may not be able to compute the amount of *harm*. I think it best for the entire parish that he be very respectfully informed of the present state of feeling. *Of course* he will ask for a dismissal when he understands where the only remaining trouble lies."

Doctor Jennings was an old and tried friend of Mr. Humphreys; and although he was in a measure reconciled to the loss with which the parish was threatened in his dismissal, provided that act should certainly lead to lasting benefits hereafter, still his heart clung with its wonted tenacity to the friendship of former days. He had himself engaged Mr. Humphreys to preach for the people of Brookboro' when Mr. Joseph Bard was yet a mere boy.

So for a moment he looked steadily in the young man's eyes.

"You talk fluently enough of it," said he; "but do you really think you have *understood* all this matter? Do you candidly suppose you know what is *being done* at this very moment, and through your instrumentality?"

"If I could respect Mr. Humphreys as I once did," was the reply, "I am sure I should be the last to think

thus of his going away. But how can I? Just see what a condition we are all in, and through *him*!”

“Through *him*, Joseph Bard?” said the doctor, kindling. “No; it is rather through *you* — through only your own means. The truth shall not be kept back about this matter, especially if we have to sacrifice our minister. It shall all be told, cut as it may.”

The young man was a little disconcerted.

“How do you mean ‘through *me*?’” he stammered out.

“Why, don’t you know yourself, without the need of *my* telling you, that it was your own silly quarrel with Mr. Plimton — as good a man as Brookboro’ has got, too — that began this business? And what was it all about? Any *common* man would have been willing to settle it on *any* terms rather than split the church, destroy the entire peace of the parish, and drive off a minister that’s been settled here for twenty years and upwards! What a wicked trifling it is! No — I see well enough how it will end, and end speedily. But do not go to work in *this* way. You will have quite enough to regret, I can tell you, after you have *lost* Mr. Humphreys, without your thus driving him away.”

“I’m sure I do not wish to drive him off,” said he. “I take the ground that it is only for the benefit of *the parish*.”

“Yes; and now, what is it that *makes* it such a benefit? Why, the hope that after he goes all troubles will disappear? But what caused these troubles in the first place? What has kept them alive so long? Who is the guilty

party all through this matter? You *know*, Joseph Bard! You need not be told who it was! You certainly know that *your minister* was not the cause of the trouble."

"Really, Doctor Jennings, I don't think I understand you."

"Then it's because I am not plain enough. Do you wish me to be more so? Can I be? Do you want me to tell you that, as soon as Mr. Humphreys has gone, the parish will be in a worse state than ever?"

"I do not think so, Doctor Jennings. I think it will be quite the contrary."

"Do you want me to tell you, too, that if he goes he will be driven away—yes, fairly *driven away*—by the foulest and most wicked means it is possible to employ? Shall I tell you that the curse of Heaven will rest on a people that consents to so great a wrong? Do you wish me to rehearse to you how wickedly he has been dragged into this miserable quarrel by these two parties, but by yourself especially, and finally is made to suffer, the innocent for the guilty? Shame on such practices, Joseph Bard! Shame! I never thought I should live long enough to be a witness of them in this dear old town of Brookboro'!"

"Doctor Jennings," returned he, "you are greatly mistaken in your opinion."

"In what opinion am I mistaken?" he quickly inquired. "I wish you would tell me."

"That Mr. Humphreys has been *dragged into* this quar-

rel. He came into it himself, voluntarily. It is that very thing that I complain of; it is that which makes the mischief. If he had been content to go on and mind his own affairs, I promise you he would never have heard of any ill feeling towards him on our part. He chose to interfere and to take sides; and this is what comes of it."

"No such thing, sir! — no such thing! You *know* better! Mr. Humphreys never opened his lips on one side or the other until the trouble made itself felt in the church. We set him over our church, expecting him to do his duty; and he has tried conscientiously to do it. Whatever may have been the nature of his reflections while the difficulty was confined to its original limits, he never said one word of it to any person living; that you well know. It was only when the matter made such progress as to *force* itself on his attention that he interfered at all. And this is what comes of it! And even if he does go, will not the questions still come up all the time before us, 'Who is in fault? Who did this mischief?' Of course it will; and I cannot say that I envy the conscience of the one who must, some day or another, feel himself convicted of all this wrong."

"But this is hardly what I accosted you for," said Mr. Bard.

"No, I suppose not," quickly responded the doctor.

"Will you put your name to this paper, as a friend of general peace?"

"No, sir!"

And he turned hastily away from the young storekeeper, and walked off at a quick step towards home.

Mr. Bard next found himself in the office of Mr. Sanger, the village lawyer. His name was among the first written on the paper.

"Well," said the lawyer, eying his visitor rather satisfiedly, "how does the work get on?"

"O, nicely — nicely, sir," answered the other, taking a chair.

"You think you can forestall him, don't you?"

"Look at my list of names," said Joseph, producing the paper on which he relied to accomplish his end.

The lawyer ran over the names rapidly, humming aloud as he did so.

"All very good," said he; "the best people we've got. I see you've got pretty much all there that's really necessary. You don't manage to get Doctor Jennings yet?"

The young man half averted his face, intending a gesture of contempt.

"Doctor Jennings!" sneered he. "What influence can *he* have? I would rather he *wouldn't* give his name."

"Then you have asked him, have you?"

"Yes," said he, hesitatingly, "I *asked* him; but I never expected to accomplish any thing by asking."

"He refused, did he?"

"Out and out."

"Just like him! Terribly obstinate, I declare! As obstinate a man as we've got in all the parish. But no

matter. We're too strong even for him. There are all the substantial people of the village on your list, I see ; and that is enough."

" Yes, and all the mill people besides — owners and operatives."

" Well, that certainly will do. I have no fears any further."

And what — to stop and ask one simple question — was the cause of Mr. Sanger's prejudice against Mr. Humphreys ? Why should he sympathize so much more deeply with the Bards and their peculiar interests than with any other party ?

It is humiliating to be obliged to record such things against even such a weakness as human nature. Mr. Sanger had never forgotten, and never would forget, what he considered Mr. Humphreys' unjustifiable interference in the matter of Mr. Chauncey, the poor man who was thrown into jail by his instrumentality. From that day forward he had hated the minister with a mortal hatred ; and though he suffered his real feelings to lie concealed beneath the covering of external respect for Mr. Humphreys, he yet inwardly resolved to employ the first opportunity that offered for the complete gratification of his revenge. The time, he thought, had finally come.

Mr. Joseph Bard and he indulged in quite a protracted conversation on the chances of success for their plan, at the end of which they separated in a full conviction and assurance that what they had purposed so seriously could by no accident miscarry.

The petition, or request, was finally duly signed. The next thing was, to get it fairly into the hands of Mr. Humphreys.

Mr. Bard thought of several ways; but no one of them seemed altogether to suit him. At last he struck upon the design of enclosing it in letter form and dropping it in the post office, which was in his own store!

So he did. When Mr. Humphreys next came in, therefore, and called for his mail, who but Mr. Joseph Bard's own self should hand him this identical document!

Mr. Humphreys took it and opened it before him. The young man partially slunk behind the office boxes, and eyed the clergyman through the little glass windows. He saw the color rush into Mr. Humphreys' face, and then as suddenly leave it. The paleness terrified him.

The clergyman saw at a glance the tenor of the missive, and involuntarily threw a look at Mr. Bard, who was still perched behind the office boxes. It was a look full of sorrow and reproach. Might it not be pardoned to human nature if it was also a look of profound and unspeakable *disgust*?

Immediately Mr. Humphreys left the store for home.

Mr. Joseph Bard enjoyed telling it all over to his wife that evening; and Lucy, in turn, was too communicative to keep it from her mother; and both Mrs. Burroughs and Mrs. Bard compared feelings on the subject to their full and complete satisfaction.

"Now we shall see if we can't have another minister!"

said Lucy ; and her mother, and her mother-in-law, and all her friends echoed the sentiment — expression, tone, and all.

Until the moment when Mr. Humphreys carefully read the written request of his parish for his withdrawal, signed by one of the church deacons, too, he had been utterly ignorant of so decided and general a wish for his dismissal. He had heard, to be sure, reports enough of the great dissatisfaction of some ; and he had known that some thought his voluntary withdrawal the only condition of a general peace ; but never until now had he been willing to believe that his dismissal was so positively *desired*, and that, too, by nearly all the members of his parish. It was time he made up his mind now at once.

He *had* nearly determined to ask for a dismissal before, setting forth at the same time the circumstances that led him to this step ; but still he had delayed doing so. Now, however, the affair assumed a different aspect. He was especially *requested* to offer his resignation ! There was no further alternative left him. He was really *forced* to do now what he had been prayerfully hesitating to do for so long !

O, it is impossible to describe the anguish that rent his soul as he looked rapidly back over his past life here in Brookboro', and reviewed his whole course, and then took into his thoughts the reality that was now upon him ! Ingle-side was truly a place of mourning ; not because of the trials that were to come, for God could abundantly provide

against them ; but because of the mistaken perverseness of the people. He loved this people, and had loved them for years. His heart was entirely bound up in them and their highest welfare. He had striven for long years to make himself acceptable to them, and, above all, to make both them and himself acceptable with God. Yet he did not repine ; it was no part of his duty. His path was plain before him, that he need not hesitate how or where to go forward.

Immediately he sent in his resignation to the church, setting forth the unhappy causes that led to it, and bewailing the calamity that was to separate him from a people he had so deeply loved. The church held an early meeting and discussed freely the subject of accepting his resignation. Doctor Jennings was there, and had much to say in his foreible way about the matter. He condemned the whole quarrel and those who were the guilty causes of it ; yet he would not obstinately persist in urging Mr. Humphreys to stay if he thought his usefulness was at an end.

The resignation was finally accepted, and Mr. Humphreys was notified that his people were ready to dissolve the connection that had bound them so long.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FAREWELL SERMON.

ON the Sunday afternoon when it was given out that Mr. Humphreys would preach his "farewell," the little meeting house was crowded with people.

It is not necessary that I should attempt to specify all the peculiar motives that collected so many more there than usual, for that would be apparent enough on the face of it. They were all there, however. Even those who had for some time hitherto steadily refused to hear the gospel preached by their faithful pastor now flocked to the church to hear his last words, as if they enjoyed their own indescribable and unenviable triumph.

The Bards were out in all their force. The old family seats, so long vacant, now were filled. Mr. Israel Bard and his wife, Mrs. Joseph Bard, her husband, and Mrs. Burroughs, and all their friends far and near, especially they who had shown themselves such during this unhappy difficulty. Even Esquire Sanger came out to hear what

Mr. Humphreys could have to say for himself, as he expressed it.

Those who truly loved their minister, whose hearts were altogether free from the guile this quarrel had engendered, and who firmly believed that the best and only way to unite the church again was by means of this great sacrifice of their pastor, — they were present in large numbers. The honest, sincere, simple souls, whom the faithful shepherd had fed and nourished from week to week and from year to year, — they came with sorrowful feelings, knowing, yet not able fully to realize, that they were about to undergo a heavy loss, and one that might, in their day at least, be irreparable.

An electrical sensation continually passed through every nature. All seemed to feel that the occasion was one of deep and strong excitement. During the prayer, which was pronounced in the usually calm and meek tones of the clergyman, this strange feeling began visibly to assert its presence. As he appealed so earnestly to God, the Father of all, for direction and guidance for this little flock that was so soon to be without a pastor, his words melted the hearts of the truly devout and trustful, and tears ran plentifully from their eyes. He besought God's peculiar blessing on the church every where, and on this little branch of his church, too. He committed them to his fatherly care, that would not willingly suffer even a single one to go astray. O, if Mr. Humphreys had ever seemed lacking in

fervor and faithfulness before, what must they all have thought of him now?

After the hymn, which sounded more solemn and sad to his ears, and to all ears, than hymn had sounded in that little church for years, he slowly and deliberately rose from his seat and announced his text. His face was extremely pale and careworn; and as his eyes dropped casually on his family, gathered sorrowfully in the ancient pew just beneath the pulpit, his very looks challenged the sympathy of those over whom his words might have had no influence.

His text was from the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, the sixth chapter and third verse — “Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.”

After rehearsing the circumstances under which Paul wrote his inspired letters to the Corinthians, while yet they were a small and feeble church, he proceeded almost immediately to make application of the words he had quoted to the condition of things in our humble church at Brookboro’.

I shall not follow him through the whole of his discourse; that were needless. But herewith are given a few extracts from it, that may be edifying to my readers at large, even if they failed of their proper effect upon some of those who sat and heard them on that day:—

“Whenever differences arise among a people, they should be quelled by the earliest and most strenuous exertions. Especially is this true when such differences begin between

those of the same religious household. Therein is the world only to know that our walk is holy — is entirely distinct from theirs. Shall they have it in their mouths to say of us that we in no wise differ from them in our practices? Then what becomes of this Christian profession of ours? Of what worth is our show of faith except as a *mere* show — except as a gloss for actions that bring discredit and disgrace upon the sacred cause of Christ — except as a visible bond to hold partisanship together, and beget no better fruit than hypocrisy and deceit?

“No man can tell at the outset where a little anger may carry him. No one can pretend accurately to foresee the results to which the malice that is not crushed *at once* will not lead. The human heart, prone to error as it is every day, unaided of Him who is only able to give us strength as we need, is nothing but pride and folly. He who boasts, whether publicly or within himself, of his own ability to sustain himself, is already an open enemy to God and a downright foe to all his fellow-men. Charity is at the very foundation of true piety, and not more of piety than of those kind and affectionate sentiments that serve to hold the social condition together. Charity endureth long — suffereth all things — is not puffed up. It is meekness; and meekness is love. Unless the Christian possesses this, his profession is vain and his faith is empty.

“Brethren, it is always an easy thing to begin a difference; but it is *not* so easy to check it where you would be glad to check it. Once fan a flame, and you cannot tell

where its ravages will stop. To commence a quarrel, whether upon trivial or important pretexts, is to be guilty of that which no man, especially no Christian man, would venture upon. And if quarrels are to be prevented in their very beginning, rather than allowed to run on till great sacrifices are required to heal them, all bickerings, envyings, strife, and malice must be early and thoroughly eradicated from the heart. Nothing short of this will do. All other measures are vain, for they aim at results that are totally unattainable through these means.

“First pray God that you may have the strength and the courage to crucify the old Adam, and then hope for the growth of the new Spirit. Until the former is made clean and thoroughly purged from its corruption, the latter cannot see the true life after which it strives and for which it prays. There is no fellowship between holiness and unholiness. God and Mammon have ever been at open enmity. You need not try to go through life professing devotion to Heaven, professing only resignation to God’s will, professing perfect obedience not only to the letter but likewise to the spirit of his moral law, and still walking in no wise differently from those who are not known of God, whose delight is solely in their own inclinations, passions, and desires. Be sure, be *very* sure, that your sin will find you out. There is no escape from a condemning conscience.

“If, my brethren, you have charity one towards another, you will have all things else; for without charity the rest

are as nothing. You will bear perfect love one towards another; and 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' You must love each other as you love your own selves; and therein will the law assert itself as supreme in your natures. And if there be love, there can be no contention. There can then exist no strife. The soil of the heart will refuse to grow such weeds in its bosom, and they cannot take root nor thrive. There can live no quarrels. Your relations will be those of unmixed happiness and peace. But just so soon as disturbances arise, as they already have arisen, know that your profession is vain and your faith is vain. Know it from that single thing alone. You are not then Christians, even though you may still call yourselves so. You are not then obeying the gospel of Christ, which every where on its illumining pages rebukes you for your practices. You do disgrace to that gospel, and that knowingly, too. You invite the severest penalties of an offended God, who would not that even the little ones should stumble by your means. •

"The devoted servant of God should be ready at all times to take up his cross and follow patiently on after the example of his Lord Jesus. He has no right to repine or murmur at the hardness of his lot. Whatever is laid upon him is for him meekly to bear. Only in this way can he abundantly certify the sincerity of his calling and the strength of his soul's great hope.

"Brethren, let me esteem it no light cross this day laid upon me that I am now called upon to offer you my sad

and most reluctant farewell. It is a sore affliction to my spirit — let me freely confess it to you. My thoughts carry me backward over the field of an unbroken intercourse of a score of years — an intercourse of the most familiar and endearing character and full to crowding with its many blessings. I feel that I am taking my leave of my own people. They are the people whom I loved in my youth with all the tenderness and earnestness of my nature. They took me affectionately by the hand when I was still young in the ministry, and encouraged me, under God, to greater efforts in his cause. They received me and those so dear to me into the open arms of their love, where I might feel that I was safe from the world's storms and temptations. And now they are about to let me go again, as if the time of my usefulness had expired.

“My dear friends, brothers and sisters, I cannot thank you sufficiently for all your kindnesses to me. I cannot find language that shall convey to you a tithe of the feelings that gratitude and affection stir so tumultuously within my breast. Let me simply say from my heart, I thank you. And let me likewise implore the blessing of our good Father upon every one of you and upon the cause which he has seen fit thus to build up in your midst. I cannot recall our many delightful and endeared associations. They bring tears, blinding tears, to my eyes, and stifle the free utterance of my tongue. Let the past live only in memory. Let its influences live perpetually in your conduct. It cannot wholly die; it can never be altogether forgotten.

“For many years I have tried faithfully and with prayer to perform my duty. God grant each one of you can say the same. It is a blessed thought that the consciousness of duty performed, coupled with a never-dying trust in the Lord Jesus, is sufficient to throw a blaze of light into the very corners of our darkest afflictions and to cheer and encourage the heart in its lowest deep of despondency. It is my most earnest wish, then, that this consciousness may be fully experienced of each one of us here present.

“I may have come short, brethren ; yet I have so labored that my work might be finally acceptable. My standard has at no time been a human standard. I have looked for a higher mark, where I found the prize of my exalted calling. If what I have thus wrought among you has been approved of God, then have I nothing further to answer. But let my last words, if these are such, be, that not willingly, not knowingly, not through recklessness have I run into error, but, if at all, because of the infirmities of the flesh which it will require a life's warfare to overthrow. Let my last words commend themselves to your belief when I solemnly tell you that I have ever borne and still bear only the purest love for you all. You every one have my blessing. I can leave you no more save the remembrance of the faithful labor of a score and more of years. When I go from among you, I pray that at least my *motives* be rightly interpreted. I trust they have been at no time other than those of the true Christian minister. Even

if you condemn *me*, do not, I beg of you, utterly condemn *them*.

“The strength of my days is gone. My energies have been freely and entirely employed in your highest service. In this world they can never be recovered again. You have had their fruits entirely to yourselves. If it be so that even one single soul has recovered from its blindness in all this time of my labor with you, then, indeed, is my reward ample and full. I ask no more but to be approved by that humble soul when its account is finally rendered at the great day.

“Brethren, I go from you, and you will see my face no more. Still, I shall ever bear about with me my former love for you and for your highest welfare. You will always be carried in my heart to the throne where I pray that we may all obtain grace and mercy when we most need them. Remember me, remember mine, brethren, in your prayers. Do not fail to keep it freshly in your minds that only *love* can make and keep you all united. Love one another, then, in all humility. Resist the devil. Go often to your closets alone, and there commune secretly with your hearts, and pray for strength to the end. ‘We separate now, but we shall meet again. Let us so live that, when that solemn day of meeting comes, we may all find room in those mansions which our Father has made ready for the blessed.’”

When the last sentence was spoken there was not one

in all that congregation who did not give free evidence of his deep emotion. Even they who had taken up arms so vehemently against their minister now felt melted by the gracious syllables of love that flowed from his lips. The elder Mr. Bard was affected to tears. His experience told him then what a loss was that from which all were to suffer. Mrs. Burroughs was sorely troubled, and thought of the firm friendship that once existed between Mr. Humphreys and her husband. Lucy was shamed, so that her face seemed covered with confusion. And Mr. Joseph Bard affected for a while to face it boldly through ; but even he was compelled to withdraw his pretentiousness into humbler quarters. The mill people were only astonished.

But if the opponents of our good minister were thus affected, how shall I attempt to convey an idea of the feeling that swept like a blowing wind through the hearts of his early and still attached friends? They wept tears such as had never flowed in that little church from their eyes before. Now and then a half-stifled sob of distress broke from some female lips that sent its echoes every where over the hushed congregation. There was hardly a dry eye among them. Old Doctor Jennings wept like a little child. And such examples were contagious. A stranger there on that day would have thought it the most solemn and affecting sight he had ever been called to behold.

The day of final separation arrived. Mr. Humphreys had succeeded through a friend in procuring an academy

in an adjoining state, and thither he was about to betake himself. His furniture and all his household articles were packed and sent on before to the distant railroad. He and his little brood were to follow speedily after.

He went around the parish, accompanied by his wife, and made his farewell calls. Many gathered at his house to take their final leave. The rest he determined to call on himself. Miss Buss had been there; but still he wanted to walk with his wife over to the spot where he and Lucy Burroughs once walked on that pleasant afternoon of his first summer in Brookboro'. They went there together. But how different were his feelings now from the old-time memories!

And such as honest old Zack Wheaton and his sisters he did not forget, either; nor good Mrs. Margaret Grey, long bereaved of her charge, Jessie Dean; nor Mr. Chauncey, whose little flower died on the night when he was so cruelly committed to prison; nor any of that host of poor and humble souls whose love for him was his own exceeding great reward. They all wept over him and over his wife. Their hearts were very sorrowful at thinking of his loss; but they hoped God would make it up to him in the next world if he did not get his reward in this. He went away with their blessings. It was all the wealth he desired to carry.

They were a sad group that got into the stage, one afternoon, from the piazza of Mr. Thistle's old tavern; and there were many who stood weeping around them. Some

felt as if the parish itself had ceased to be. There were few words spoken ; but those few, with the looks, and sobs, and whispers, were volumes to the hearts of the exiles.

And Brookboro' lost its minister ; and for a long time we felt truly that we were as sheep without a shepherd

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DESOLATION.

INTO a lonely school room, whose echoes called up so sadly his first experience in teaching, during those early years when he studied for his profession and when he learned to love the simple beauty of her who had now for so long been his faithful wife, he again went. But it could hardly be said that he fell to his new work with any bounding of his energies or any exultation of his spirits.

He was not able, even with the assistance of friends, to secure a very large number of pupils; so he was compelled to solicit a few boarders in his family to make up the deficiency in his revenue. They were all pupils, however, whom he could thus have under his immediate training and care. The village where the academy was located was a very quiet spot, into which few strangers might be expected to come except for the single object of educating themselves. Mr. Humphreys did not dare nor did he wish to lay down any very extended plans for the rest of his life. All he desired was to make himself useful wherever

he might happen to be called. He hoped to find an adequate support for himself in his calling, and tried to labor assiduously for the improvement of those who were committed to his care.

But yet it was quite easy to see that there had set in a disease into his heart that no medicine could ever expect to drive away. From the day he turned his back sorrowfully on the people he loved so devotedly he was in all respects a changed man. He found himself utterly unable to rally the strength of former years for his new work. It was impossible for him to excite and concentrate his interest as he felt he ought to do on the vocation to which he had resorted. The fire of his younger years was burned out.

Ah, more — more than this. He was a broken-hearted man!

Matters went on soberly with them for some time. All their efforts seemed but mechanical, and they could not help reproaching themselves that it was so. Yet they could not help it. The great light and hope of their life was gone out. Their faith still glowed and warmed their hearts; yet nothing could lift the heavy burden of sorrow, begot of the ingratitude of others, from the poor, weak shoulders of humanity. They plodded on wearily, looking forward to little else than their final rest. Each thought — how could they well help it, with such a severe lesson? — that his and her part had been quite performed — that the day of usefulness was finally over.

Alfred, the eldest boy, was placed soon in a store, far away from the immediate influence and companionship of his parents, the early project of educating him at college having been abandoned. The income was not sufficient to warrant the expenditure; and if it happened to be just now, it was of a very uncertain and precarious nature; so it would be unsafe to depend upon that. Alfred had been a dutiful child always, and his parents hoped to see him a useful and estimable citizen. Having gone through just the trying scene he had, too, he felt an ambition stir within his breast to hasten and do for his parents all that might be in his power to do.

The other two children still remained with their parents and attended school. The hearts of Mr. Humphreys and his wife were bound up in their welfare, and they labored now only for their ultimate happiness. They had hardly any thing more to ask for themselves here.

Mrs. Humphreys had never murmured or repined. The shock that she was called to endure at the period of her husband's dismissal from Brookboro' was meekly met, and silently she tried to bear her griefs. She even kept back from her husband the cause of her sad feelings, or so much as their perpetual presence in her heart. She thought they would but add to the fearful weight of his own burden; and therefore her lips were sealed to even the lightest whisperings of complaint.

She bore on and on, and all the time silently. Such grief is always the most fearful. It wears into the heart

steadily, when others see it not, when even the sufferer's own self may know it not. It eats its cankerous way by stealthy degrees, deceiving not less the victim than the beholder. Day by day her spirits fell — day by day she became weaker. She called in a medical adviser. Her husband attended on her watchfully and anxiously, vainly endeavoring to cheer her heart, but never alluding to the real cause of the trouble. She finally took to her bed, and there gave up entirely to her now serious illness.

For a time the school was broken up, and the pupils went home. Mr. Humphreys devoted every hour of his waking moments to the care of his wife. No man could be more devoted. He silently prayed for her restoration, that she might still live to comfort with the rich blessing of her love his declining years.

It was an autumn afternoon when she requested that her children might be called in to her bedside. Alfred had already come home, hearing of his mother's protracted illness. Father and children were around her, watching her pallid countenance tearfully, and hoping that she might herself be deceived as to her condition.

But no ; the decree had long been registered.

She hoped she should meet them all again, in heaven ; and on the wings of prayer she passed into eternal light.

Sorrows come not singly.

The winter wore away, and Mr. Humphreys wore away with it, too. Ere the late snows had entirely sunk into the

warmed bosom of the pastures and hillsides, and before the fresh grass sprouted greenly down through the valleys and along under the walls and hedges, and the released brooks burst away from their icy fetters to sing and clap their liquid palms through the open meadow lands, he had gone to lie down by the side of her he loved so well in the quiet village churchyard, bequeathing to his sorrowing orphans no wealth but the wealth of a faithful example, and beseeching them with all the tender impressiveness of his dying words to walk worthy of their calling, and look forward in hope to a final reunion at the great day.

O, how desolate were those orphaned hearts now, without father or mother to lean lovingly upon — without the deepest sympathy they needed so much — without compass or rudder to guide them through the shocks of this rude world — young and inexperienced, yet holding fast to the faith they had learned by the example and precepts of their parents!

God grant it may carry them safely — safely through!

There were two boys. They could at least try and care tenderly for their sister. And she, — she must for a time go among strangers, who knew nothing of the devotion by which her own mother had so long surrounded her every step, almost her every thought. In her little sable suit she would abundantly challenge the sympathies of those who knew her history; but all their sympathies were not a single drop to supply the deep waters of love that constantly overflowed from the heart of a mother.

Pity the orphans! Yes, pity them indeed. God pity them; for it is only he who can at all help them. They hunger for other food than what the world's mockery of words can supply. They shut up their hearts soon against the influences of abiding affection, unless that affection is miraculously offered where in human nature it can rarely or never be expected.

The family thus were broken up. Wretched fragments were they now of a once happy and beautiful whole!

Joseph Bard, had *your obstinacy* any thing to do in working this deplorable result? — and all within four short years of the day when you thought you had achieved a noble *victory*!

It was after hearing of the sad death of our once faithful pastor and his wife, and after the expiration of a very protracted absence from quiet little Brookboro', that I again returned to the village. Knowing the whole result so well, and remembering so freshly the incidents that in their time had led on to it all; I confess it was with a stranger feeling than I ever had before that I went thoughtfully through the place, reading every lesson that might be written in its forehead.

And these were the records in which those solemn lessons were conveyed to my eyes.

First I called at Ingleside — at the dear old parsonage where we loved to gather, as if we were all a part of the family there, too. The house was entirely closed. The

door was fastened, the windows were down, and the blinds carefully secured. Four years gone, and still no one living here ! It startled me.

It was a sweet summer's day, with blue sky overhead and pleasant green every where under foot. No time could have been chosen, even had I the entire control of my choice, on which to walk about so beloved a spot ; and yet no time, as it seemed, could have forced on my heart the feeling of sadness and desolation that was begot of every thing I saw. The bees were making a droning hum among the blossoms of the creeper that still clung to the house ; but the vine wanted the careful training of the hand that now rested from its work and its device in the grave. It had straggled about every where, rambling over the seats on either side of the little porch, and staining the floor with its crushed blossoms and decaying leaves. The grass edged along from its plat, and crowded on the flower beds and over the front walk. The plum and pear trees looked ragged, calling for the blade of the pruning knife or the jagged teeth of the saw.

But the house itself, thus shut up alone, with no living being to start a voice in its parlors or to waken an echo in its chambers, dismal and darkened, standing away from other houses, as if it could hardly keep congenial fellowship with them, — it was this that so deeply impressed me. Here had been born hopes such as would blossom only in heaven. Here had fervent prayers gone up, as sacred incense from a family altar, for the well being of the parish

and the eternal welfare of souls. Saintly examples were here set, the which, if only the rest should faithfully copy them, would make the whole town round about rich beyond compute in love and harmony.

O, how could I keep back the blinding tears — how could I stifle the reproachful regrets — how could I help giving way to all the sad and bitter thoughts that poured through my brain while on that beautiful day in summer I stood alone and reviewed it all — the past, that could never, never come back again !

I wandered through the village street, intending to walk onward to the mills. It was with no small degree of foreboding that I saw the deserted condition of things. Few persons met me on my way, and those few looked more as if they were lost than pursuing any definite purpose.

At length I reached the mills.

My hands involuntarily lifted themselves, as a silent exclamation of surprise, when my eyes took in the whole picture.

There stood the huge stone mill, to be sure ; but how vastly changed ! It seemed as if the smutty workers for Vulcan, the ancient Cyclops themselves, had converted it into a dwelling. The roof was gone — the chimneys had fallen — the windows were all out. There were no doors to shut out intruders or idlers ; and black, pitchy black stains, large and broad, covered the stone walls in great patches near every window.

The mill had been burned !

I came nearer and viewed the desolation. I looked round upon the late owners' houses. They were all deserted. There was nothing but silence brooding about them. The vast masses of ruined machinery lay piled on the ground, having fallen through the burned floors, and there presented a terrible wreck. The noble stone mill itself, with its huge and high walls, stood out against the blue sky of summer in bold relief, blackened and begrimed—a lasting monument to the genius and power of devastation.

I afterwards learned that the mill company had been ruined by the fire, and were compelled to evacuate the premises occupied by them. They scattered in all directions,—owners, managers, and operatives,—bringing down a loud cry from all sides about their heads. There was not living at this time four families in all the houses that were sprinkled along between that spot and the village street.

I climbed musingly about over the ruins, leaping from rock to rock and stone to stone, the whole picture stretching forebodingly out before me, when I finally found myself by the brink of my favorite little river. It really seemed to me to be never so glad, never so full of joy, as if it were spitefully laughing at the wonderful destruction that had been wrought, and determined to assert nothing but its own frolicsome supremacy again. To be sure, the great dam obstructed its movements; but then it did not *work*—it *would not* work; it would only leap, and laugh, and sing, swimming down under the shadows of the overhanging

trees, or dashing and flashing among the rocks it whitened with its silvery froth and foam.

The little river was the only thing that seemed glad to see me ; that heartily welcomed me back to the pleasant old haunts again.

Inquiries through the village afterwards, united to what I was in the way for observing myself, told me of the failure of Mr. Joseph Bard in business, he having incautiously risked a large amount upon the mills that were destroyed. It had all gone ; and he went with it, too. His father, out of his whole property, had managed to save his farm ; and upon this he and Lucy worked hard, earning their bread literally by the sweat of their brows.

Doctor Jennings was there ; but he was getting old very fast, and never ceased to bewail the irreparable loss from which the parish and the town suffered in the dismissal of Mr. Humphreys. The opposition fully agreed with him in opinion ; but they said nothing. It was their punishment, that, while they suffered, shame itself compelled them to suffer in silence, and so all the more keenly.

The village seemed entirely dead. There was no interest, no life, any where. If men happened now and then to fall in with one another as they lounged lazily along the street, it was but to pick up a stray chip, whittle it to shavings, and pass silently on.

There was only irregular preaching in the meeting house, and the flock of humble souls went unfed. Occa-

sionally a travelling clergyman consented to stay with them over Sunday; but no one had ever yet, since Mr. Humphreys' day, accepted a "call" there, and it looked now quite unlikely that for some time any one would. The history of the parish was a standing reproach unto itself the country round. Religious interest had subsided, or had died out entirely. Nettle weeds sprang up and choked the growth of the good seed. The fathers, of a truth, had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge. I could not help repeating aloud to myself the lines from Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* as I wandered around the place —

“ Here, as I take my solitary rounds,
Amid *these* tangling walks and ruined grounds,
And, many a year elapsed, return to view
Where once the cottage stood, the hawthorn grew,
Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain ! ”









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